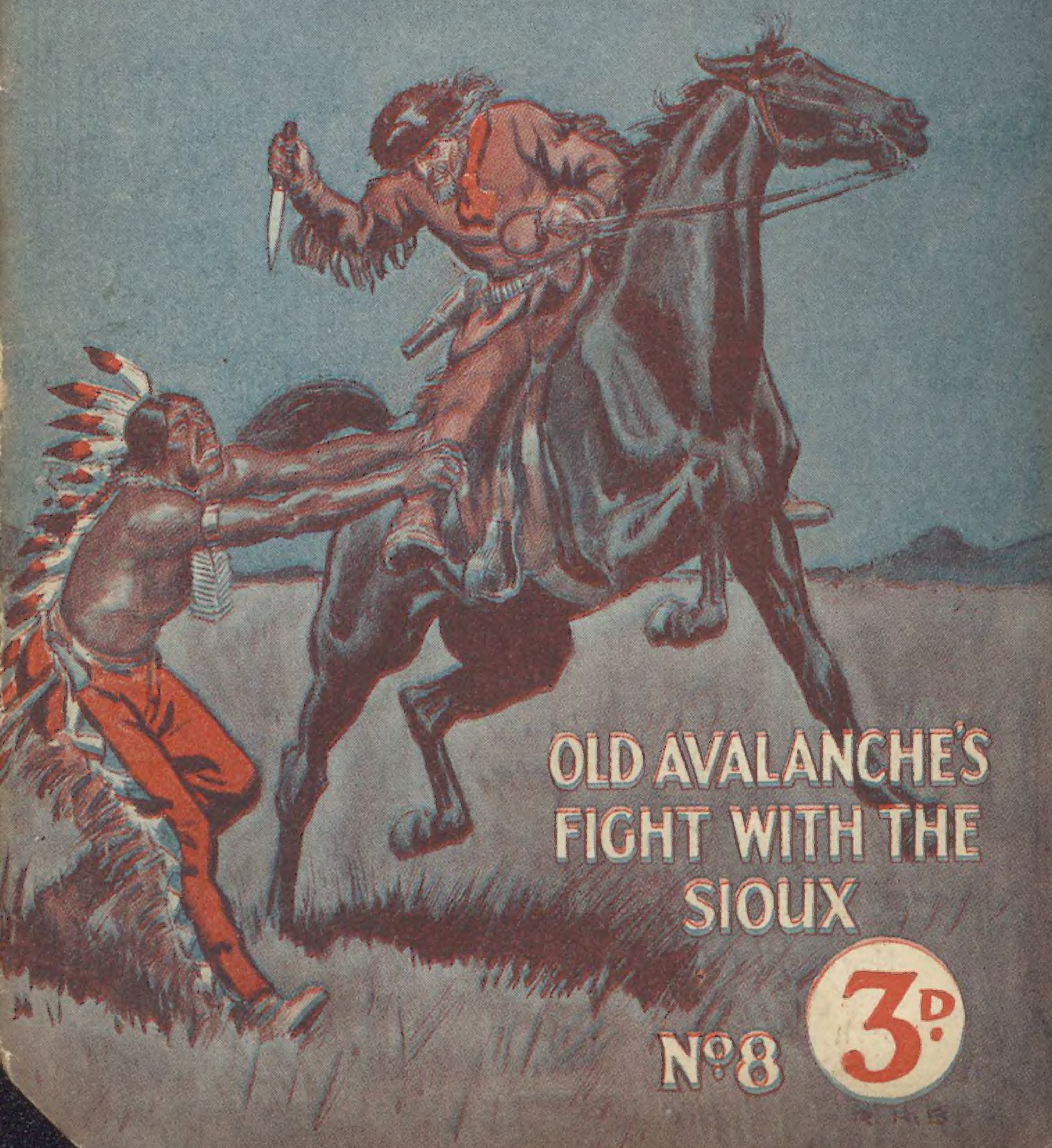


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OLD AVALANCHE'S FIGHT WITH THE SIOUX

CHAPTER I

BURIED IN THE DEATH GULCH

FOUR men had pitched their camp on the crater of a northern peak, thousands of feet above the level of the sea, and thousands of feet above the level of the great plains of Nebraska, at the close of what had been a sultry August day.

The peak table-land was far the most elevated of any of its neighbours of the surrounding chain, and its top was as smooth and even as a floor, while in dimensions it was about three hundred feet in circumference.

On the northern, eastern and southern boundaries, stretched away mile after mile, one continuous wilderness of rugged and tree-fringed mountains, whose tops were capped with snow, and down between which dashed angry torrents, silvery cascades and slides of rock and frozen ice, into dark, yawning seams and chasms.

On the western side of this aerial plateau, yawned an immense, fathomless abyss, whose aspect was weird, silent, awful in the extreme.

While two of the four men were preparing the evening meal, the remaining two stood at the brink of the precipice, regarding the scene with awe and silence.

The space in front of them was about fifty feet in width by one hundred in length—a naturally formed shaft extending far down into the bowels of the earth. Directly across on the western side, and considerably below the plateau, a goodly-sized cascade leaped over into the abyss, and as no sound could be distinguished of its striking bottom, the watchers drew the conclusion that the rift reached down at least to a level with the plains.

"'Tis a frightful gulch!" ejaculated the elder of the two—a man of some eight and

thirty years—"at the bottom of which nothing of life has probably ever existed."

"Yes. In all our explorations, Sir Henry, we have never confronted such a fissure of the earth. By my soul, I'd give a deal to be able to descend to the bottom, if there is a bottom, and see what sort of a place this chasm really is."

"True, Milburn; but that could never be. It would require miles of rope to lower one down, and though we have a good thousand feet, 'twould not be enough.

"Let us be content, then, with the laurels of discovering the highest peak of this wonderful chain of mountains, if not the highest in America. On the morrow I will hew the name of this expedition in the floor of this high plateau, to tell future generations whose feet first trod upon these rocks."

So saying, Sir Henry turned back toward the camp-fire, while Milburn remained a short time longer at the brink of the dizzy abyss, staring thoughtfully down into the black depths.

"Curse him!" he muttered, gnawing at his moustache, savagely, "how I hate him."

He rejoined the party at the fire, and seated himself to partake of the dried venison and roasted bear-meat which the other two men had prepared. They were odd-looking specimens of the frontier, and plainly not persons of culture or education like Sir Henry and Milburn.

The younger and more noticeable of the twain, evidently a Canadian, was about nineteen years of age. He was swarthy in complexion yet not unprepossessing, and possessed a form marked in its muscular development.

The second man was short, grizzly and athletic, with not a pound of superfluous flesh on his limbs, nor a sign of ears upon his head, they having been shaven off close to the skull. His eyes were grey and

piercing, his mouth large and indicative of humour, his hair tow-coloured, and his beard brown and stubby.

He was attired in buckskin, as are the generality of Northern mountain-men, and armed with silver-mounted revolvers, knife, tomahawk and Spencer rifle.

"Darned bad hoel," he nodded to Sir Henry, motioning toward the abyss. "Nevyar see'd ther beet on't, only once afore, in my life."

"When was that?" asked Sir Henry.

"Wal," said the guide, meditatively, "et ar' several yeers, since. Et was ther time I war up hyar wi' ernuther 'sperdition!"

"What!" exclaimed the baronet, starting up, excitedly;—"you do not mean to tell me you were ever here, before, sir?"

"Reckon I do."

"By heavens! you have astonished me. I had supposed *we* were the first human beings who ever trod upon these rocks. Explain yourself."

"Thar hain't much ter 'splain, sar, 'ca'se ef ye'll go over yander thar, ter the sou', an' sharply screwtchinize ther rocks, ye'll see who's bin hyar ahead on ye, 'thout my 'splainin'."

Sir Henry sprang to his feet at once, as did Milburn, and seizing a flaming cone from the fire, for the pall of night had settled over the land, they hurried to the southern edge of the plateau, and bent over to scan the rocky floor. They had not long to look, for they soon came upon a spot where, by the skilful use of a hatchet, former discoverers had hewn out their names:

"JOHN C. FREMONT." "KIT CARSON."

"Here, Lanch," called Sir Henry, "come here. How did you know of these names?"

Alva Lanch, the guide, left his place by the fire, and sauntered up.

"How did I know on 'em?" he repeated, grimly. "Wal, I happened ter be hyar when they war cut. I war erlong wi' ther Fremont experdishun w'en they soar'd over thes d'recshun; an' conserkently, w'en them handles war indented thar."

"But you never told me?"

"Why shed I? Ye asked me no questions nor I didn't tell ye no whoppers. Ye guv me seventy gold dollars ter help ye git ontar ther top o' ther loftiest peak in thes range o' mountings; I tuk ye up, an' hyar ye ar', arter fifteen days' hard trampin'. Ye'd've dun better ter ask me afore we sot out ef ennybody war ever bin hyar ahead on ye. Then I shed 'a' tole ye *yes*. As it war, ye nevyar said boo, so nuther did I say boo. Et ar' so, ain't et, boss?"

"Yes; you speak truly," replied Sir

Henry, in a discouraged tone. "It was all my fault. I never addressed you on the subject, because I did not deem it necessary, so positive was I that no explorer had as yet done this range. How long ago was it?"

"Two years, three months an' seven days, ter-night."

"How long did you stay here?"

"Only over nite uv the day we arriv'. 'Twas uncomf'ble cold up hyar, them times, so we soon dug out for warmer climates. Fremont named yon hoel ther Death Gulch, becawse his spanyel dorg tumbled off inter et, an' Carson called this ther Flat Butte; then we buckled on our armour, an' marched, marched away."

"I wish I had known of this some time ago," said Sir Henry, gloomily, turning back toward the fire, whither Lanch and Milburn followed him.

Soon the evening pipes were brought forth, and while the quartette puffed away thereat, the guide related some interesting details of the former exploring expedition under the great Fremont.

Sir Henry listened eagerly, but Milburn and the young Canadian were not so much interested, and presently withdrew to the edge of the abyss to have a little conversation by themselves.

Alva Lanch watched them secretly, as he told his story, under cover of his shaggy eyebrows, but said nothing bearing upon them.

Finally the time arrived when it was desirable that all hands should turn in, as an early start was proposed on the following morning; therefore Sir Henry called in his companions, and bade them prepare for sleep.

"Thar'll hev ter be sum' more cones lugged up from ther second peak, below," said Lanch, glancing at the fire, which was fast expiring, "fer it begins ter feel er little chilly up hyar. I say, ye Can'dy Thistle, s'posin' ye go an' try yer 'nack at shinnin' rocks. I toted ther fust sackful up; et ar' no more'n fa'r ye she'd do vice-versy on ther seckont."

He addressed the Canadian, who was about to roll himself up in his blanket.

"Bah!" he growled, showing his pearly white teeth in a forced smile; "you'll excuse me. I prefer daylight for my clambering over the mountains."

"Then you won't go?" demanded Lanch.

"No; I am quite comfortable," replied the youth, wrapping himself in his blanket, and giving vent to another smile.

"Here! here! Raleigh!" exclaimed Sir Henry, angrily, "let's have no more words of bandy. Will you go for the fuel?"

"No," replied he, doggedly—"not to-night!"

"Then I shall at once discharge you from my service."

"Will you, though?" hissed the fellow savagely, his dark visage growing still darker. "Very well; just as you please, sir."

And rolling over he made pretence of seeking repose.

"Let 'im hev his own way," said Lanch, taking up a large bag, which lay among the other effects that the party had brought along. "I'll slide down fer ther cones in a jiffy. Ter-morrer I'll wallup ther young whelp fer his imperdence."

He at once descended from the plateau by clambering down from ledge to ledge, and was soon lost from view in the pall of inky blackness that enveloped the mountain-top.

"You can lie down, Sir Henry, if you like," said Milburn, as he lit a fresh pipe of tobacco, "for I know you must be fatigued, from our long ascent, to-day, and need rest. As for me, I'll smoke awhile longer, yet, and await Alva's return."

The baronet acquiesced in this proposition, and leaving Milburn half-reclining in the light of the dying embers puffing away at his imported meerschaum, Sir Henry rolled himself in his blanket, and quickly was in sound and refreshing slumber.

Half an hour wore away, and the loud respirations of the baronet proclaimed that he was sound asleep, whereupon Milburn rose stealthily to his feet, and stole forward. Simultaneously the young Canadian did likewise.

"Are you ready?" he demanded, in a whisper.

"Ay!" replied the other, "all ready. Now, then, heave ahead; you take charge of his mouth and see that a screech don't escape him, while I bind his hands and feet."

"Agreed!" whispered back the Canadian; and then the two men threw their combined weights upon the slumbering explorer, and in a twinkling had him securely bound and gagged.

It is needless to say that Sir Henry was both astonished and enraged at the rude and unceremonious treatment but could only lay and glare at the two villains in utter helplessness.

"Ha! ha!" laughed Milburn, with a grim chuckle; "you are surprised, eh?"

A nod of the head signified assent.

"I thought so," resumed the villain. "Do you recognize me, Sir Henry, as any one you remember of ever having seen?"

Another head-shake, in the negative.

"Don't? Well, probably not. I must admit my disguise is one hard to penetrate. This hair, this beard and these garments are all foreign to your recollection. Yet they hide the man, Sir Henry, whose life has been devoted, since childhood, to the sole attainment of an object—an object which must be patient in forever removing you from my path. Lis'en!" Then he bent low and whispered a few words in the prisoner's ear, at which the baronet uttered a loud, agonized groan and grew pale and agitated.

"It is true," resumed Milburn, with a triumphant leer, "and I have followed the course of your movements ever since you left New York, for the purpose of removing you. I do not wish to *kill* you. Murder on the hands of an English nobleman is not at all desirable, and therefore I simply wish to put you aside from my path. You admire America; I love England, my native soil. Then, is it not well that I should live in England, while you remain here in quiet, peace and plenty?"

"Yes!—doubly yes. I have found a cage in which I can confine you, and run no risk of ever being troubled by you again. Raleigh, bring your coil of rope, and fasten one end about this baronet. Work lively, now, for we must be well away from here, ere that ferret-eyed guide returns. Once we are safely in St. Joe, and our explorer lies at the bottom of Death Gulch, a thousand gold dollars shall be yours, my boy!"

The Canadian obeyed with alacrity, and from among the "traps" of the expedition produced a large coil of stout half-inch rope, an end of which he arranged into a noose and shirred about the baronet's waist.

This done, Milburn proceeded to deliberately rifle the prisoner's person of everything of value, save his arms and ammunition, which he did not touch. He then whispered for several moments in Sir Henry's ear, after which he rose to his feet.

"You may pitch all that luggage over into the abyss, first, Raleigh," he said, setting an example by pitching over blankets, etc., "for in our flight, you see, we shall not be able to carry aught save our weapons, and I do not mean that Alva Lanch shall derive any benefit from these tools and traps!"

Consequently everything save the two villains' rifles and ammunition was hurled over into the canyon.

Sir Henry was then dragged forward to the brink of the frightful gulf, and the lowering began.

In vain did Sir Henry endeavour to

shriek out a plea for help, or burst the cruel bonds that bound him.

All to no avail.

Swiftly the two men on the table-land above allowed the rope to slip through their fingers, and let the helpless victim of a fiendish plot descend into the bowels of the mountains.

Presently they had allowed all but about a yard of the death-cord to slip away.

"Shall we let him go?" asked Raleigh in a hollow, scared tone.

"Yes!" replied Milburn, white and ghastly—"let her slide. He's probably to the bottom before this; and if he's not, he ain't far from it. *Let go!*"

The next instant they released the rope from their grasp; then, turning like the two guilty wretches they were, they seized their rifles, left the plateau, and hurriedly scurried off down into the black mountainous depths.

CHAPTER II

FIGHTING ODDS

Down across the great savannas of the Northwest, booming along in front of a giant volume of wind, which spread its arms out afar, rolled a thick cloud of dust, in whose depths galloped a party of six persons, all mounted on spirited, thoroughbred animals.

Two of the six were ladies, attired in rich but unattractive garments; but the fact that they wore diamonds of marvellous size and lustre, evidenced the supposition that they were persons of wealth and high social rank.

The gentlemen were tastefully accoutred, save it be with one exception—the guide of the party—and bore the undeniable impress of refinement.

One, who was evidently chief in command, was a tall, athletic young fellow, with clear-cut features, dark-blue eyes, and hair of a chestnut colour, while in form he was a model of grace and symmetry.

The second of the four males was a slender, dark-visaged gentleman, verging on forty years, who was evidently a Spaniard, or of some foreign descent.

The third was of a far different type, and his hair was sprinkled freely with lines of grey. He was of immense girth, and sat his horse much more clumsily than his companions; and in his general appearance reminded one of the stern old lords or dukes of ancient times.

The ladies evidently were mother and daughter. The leader was a woman who

had seen not a little trouble, for her brow was furrowed deeply and her hair of a silvery white. Still, she showed many traces of former beauty, and was yet really prepossessing, despite the weary yearning expression that ever haunted her sad face.

The daughter was a repetition of what the mother had been in her youthful days—a bright, vivacious little body, just nearing the portals of a glorious womanhood, with laughing eyes, soft blonde hair, that blew unconfined to the prairie breeze, and a complexion that matched well with both hair and eyes.

The guide was a stalwart backwoodsman of an uncertain age, and as rough and uncouth as are the majority of those ever-moving spirits, the Princes of the Trail. His name was Dan Coggsell, and he had been engaged at Dakota City to lend his assistance to the pleasure-party, for such the cavalcade was, during their stay in the West.

It is mid-afternoon, and the sun that hangs like a golden ball in the azure blue sky, lights up all objects beneath its rays with a mellow distinctness.

Across to the west looms up the grey uninviting range of mountains that are described as being the rendezvous of numerous bands of red-skins and outlaws; to the east, coiling its course through barren prairies, runs *Au Jaques* or Dakota river, in the even tenor of its existence, until it debouches, miles below, into the mad Missouri; to the south and south-east stretches one of those monotonous savannas or grazing plains of Dakota, famous as the home of the deer and the buffalo, the paradise of hunters and trappers; while to the north and north-west—halt! here the interest deepens, and the cause of the undue haste on the part of the pleasure-seekers, becomes apparent.

Sweeping down in their rear, and only a couple of miles distant, are a body of horsemen, who, as one glances over them, look like a small army, so strong are they in numbers.

And, too, their horses are fresh and fleet, and they are gaining slowly but surely on the party in advance. That they are Indians is evidenced by their wild riding, their semi-nude dress, and the occasional war-whoops that float faintly forward on the breeze. Sioux is their tribe (for it is a rare occurrence to meet a war-party of any other tribe in Northern Dakota), and that they are determined to overtake the fugitives is only too plainly shown by the manner with which they urge on their ponies.

On, on, on, the pursued whites dashed, desperately determined to escape if such a thing were possible, but as a half-hour flew by, and the horses began to lag and the Indians to gain, Coggsell shook his head doubtfully.

"We can't hold out at this rate, much longer," he said, as he galloped ahead and joined the young commander; "for them Soos ain't goin' to give us the slip, ye can bet yer eyes; and our hosses are loosin' all their breath, too. I opine we mought as well come to a halt, an' try an' persuade 'em not to cum forninst us, as the Irishman sez, with our rifles. What's your views on't, Sir Harry?"

"What! stop here and let the devils come up and murder us at their leisure? Never! We must *do* something, guide. Is there no other direction we can take to escape these hellhounds?"

"Yas," replied Coggsell, reflectively, "thar is two on 'em."

"Then, in Heaven's name, why not take them?"

"Wal, I reckon 'twouldn't be o' no sorter use, Sir Harry. One's tow'rd Dakota river. Go that way, an' the varmints 'll head us off afore we git thar, or at furthest will drive us into the stream w'ot are too deep and wide to swim."

"The other, then?"

"The t'other? Wal, that's tow'rd them mountings, off yander. They're chock fuller o' ther red heethan an' white outlaws, than the Black Hills themselves."

"But can we not find temporary shelter there, in some canyon or gulch, where we can fight these rascals, and in due time steal off?"

"Hardly probable. Soos ain't on ther give-up, nowadays. When they scent a prize they're the lads as hes got as much hang-on-a-tiveness as ther next one. How-somedever, if ye say the word, we'll shy off fur them hills, an' run our chances."

"How far are they distant? Can we reach them before our horses give out?"

"Reckon so, if we ride full spurt."

"Very well, then lead ahead, and we will follow."

The course of the fleeing cavalcade was instantly changed, sharply to the right, and the spurs used with more vehemence.

On—on, over the green savanna they swept, and in hot pursuit came the red slayers.

"I think I know about the spot where a canyon opens into them hills," said the guide, peering straight ahead, "or at least, heerd Old Avalanche, who traps, hunts an' annihilates Injuns up hyarabouts, say that

thar war a place o' ther kind d'rect east from Flat Butte peak. *That's* off yonder!"

He pointed straight ahead, and off afar through the hazy distance loomed up the frowning awful pile of rock whose summit was hundreds of feet higher than the surrounding peaks.

"Flat Butte, did you say?" exclaimed the elderly lady, excitedly—"Flat Butte?"

"Yes, ma'am, that's what I said."

"Oh! Sir Fleming," she gasped, turning to the gentleman of the great girth, "is that the place? Is that the spot where my dear husband met his death?"

"I think not, Hetty," replied he, rather nervously, as he took the glass. "If yon peak is christened Flat Butte, it is not the one from which Sir Henry flung himself, fifteen years ago. That one is, if I remember aright, further south and east."

"Beg yer parding, sir, but I rec'ons how you're mistook. This butte are the only one's you'll find up nor', hyar, in this particular region, 'cept it be Pumpkin Butte in the Hills," said old Dan.

"No, I am *not* mistaken," was the haughty reply. "However, let's drop the subject, and turn our eyes around us, lest we be surprised."

A glance went to prove that the pursuers had come within arrow range; and were preparing for a final spurt.

On, desperately on they dashed, hotly chased by the painted man-hunters, whose yells were now increased both in volume and hideousness. On, and they were nearing the mountain range which rose so frowningly out of the almost level savanna, when Coggsell suddenly shouted:

"Look! there is the mouth of the canyon of which I speaked. If we kin git inter it, we kin fight the p'izen varmints at our leisure."

He pointed to a black angular opening in the mighty bluffs of mountain, through which gurgled a little streamlet.

A cheer rose from the lips of Sir Harry and was answered by a perfect pandemonium of yells from the savages.

In five moments Dan Coggsell led his party between the towering walls of the canyon, and ordering the ladies to ride on into the depths, he commanded the men to dismount and prepare to defend themselves.

On came the Sioux in a rush, with the idea that they could break into the canyon, but they were mistaken, there.

The horses had been wheeled broadside across the entrance, and as the savage enemy came pouring into view four well-directed bullets from the little party's repeating rifles, unhorsed as many reds.

Again the repeaters spoke, and eight

instead of four warriors went sprawling to the ground. At first the Indians were confused; and half terrified, beat a hasty retreat, out of rifle range, to hold a short consultation. Soon they came fiercely on in another rush, only to be met with a perfect stream of fire from the wonderful repeating rifles, that swept away half a dozen braves from their ranks. Again they withdrew a short distance, and leaving a post of two-score to watch the fugitives, the main body separated and swerved to either side of the canyon. Their purpose at once became evident. They were going to scale the mountains and enter the gulch from the rear.

CHAPTER III

TWO REMARKABLE VISITORS

"THEY are going to assail us from some other point," said Sir Fleming, as he with the others watched the division of the savages. "Is there another end to this canyon, guide, through which we can make our escape?"

"Wal, now, that's a question that only time can solve. P'raps thar's an outlet sumwhar more or less than five thousand miles from here, an' ag'in, p'raps thar ain't. These canyons ar' as full o' crooks, curly-quews an' curious freaks o' natur' as a mule's hind fut."

"And do you think the red-skins who just rode away contemplate climbing the mountains and getting into this canyon in our rear?" asked Sir Harry.

"I hain't ther least doubt o' it!"

"Then, in God's name, what ought we to do—what must we do?"

"That's w'at I'm cogitatin' on, but ain't made up my mind, yet. Give me room an' time to think."

Then he relapsed into silence, and while the others were watching the movements of the remainder of the Indians Dan racked his brain for some possible plan by which he could extricate the party from the impending danger.

The guard left outside the entrance were now seen to dismount and picket out their ponies, while active preparations were being made for camping on the spot. This convinced the guide that the enemy were not going to relinquish their prize, while there might be a chance of capturing it. They were going to surround and take the gorge on all sides.

"We will camp where we are," he said, at last, "an' do the best we can. 'Twon't

do to ventur' inter ther depths o' ther mountings too far, fer we mought like's not git caged thar. Sir Bruce, ye'd better trot off up the canyon, an' recall Lady Milburn an' Lady Maude, an' we'll camp right hyar fer ther present."

Sir Bruce obeyed with alacrity, and in half an hour returned with the ladies, and a camp was pitched on the spot.

By this time it was sunset, and the shadows of night settled dark and sombre over the earth.

Sir Harry volunteered to stand guard the fore part of the night, and Dan the latter; so the night passed away and another day dawned bright and rosy, without sight or sound of hostile movement from the enemy.

After breakfast Dan put the camp in charge of Sir Harry, and shouldering his rifle and mounting his horse he set off up the canyon to make observations, as he said.

The canyon soon proved itself to be similar to many others of its kind in this wild region. In places it was not over a hundred feet wide, and walled in by such mammoth towers of rock that all was densely black at the bottom, which was grassy and watered by an infant stream.

Far away, still in the dim distance, loomed up the Flat Butte like a frowning monster, as it reared its summit haughtily above those of its neighbours, and seemed to discountenance human approach.

After assuring himself that the canyon extended at least as far as the Flat Butte, he turned his horse's head toward camp.

As he retraced the route over which he had come, he minutely scanned the walls on either side of him, to see if there was any chance for the enemy to penetrate the gorge.

No; there was no opening in the great mass of rock, that would admit of passage. If they got in at all, it would be by lowering each other with lassoes from the pinnacles above, whither they would have to climb.

Satisfied that such was the true state of affairs, and that days if not weeks must elapse ere such an entrance could be effected, Cogswell rode back to the camp. Here he found matters as he had left them, and that there were no signs of immediate trouble from the twenty reds who had camped outside the mouth of the canyon.

The day passed without incident, and night with her sombre mantle overshadowed the mountains, canyon, and plain.

Sir Bruce was detailed to keep the first vigil, and Dan the last.

Accordingly, they changed off at midnight, and the guide went on duty.

The hours went slowly by, and as morning's dawn approached, the night grew blacker and stiller.

The guide had just returned from a trip around the camp, and was starting off toward the Sioux camp, when a suspicious sound arrested his attention.

It came from the direction of the entrance, and sounded like stealthy footsteps in the rustling grass.

Cocking his repeater, Dan peered straight ahead, his eyes sharply searching every object in the pass.

Watching warily for a moment longer, the guide brought his gun to his shoulder, and sang out :

"Halt ! Who comes there ?"

In an instant all was silence.

"Speak ; who are you ?" again demanded Coggsell, advancing—"friend or foe ?"

"I reckon thet ar' erbout the state o' affairs," replied a shrill, wheezy voice ; and the next moment the figure of a man leaped nimbly from the depths of the grass, and came tumbling with *handsprings* into the guide's presence, closely followed by a small, sheepish-looking animal of the genus *Capra*—a real, live, and exceedingly ugly-looking goat. Dan Coggsell leaped back in consternation at the unceremonious *debut* of the pair ; but, as the little old man ceased his eccentric revolutions and came squarely upon his feet, rifle in hand, beside the goat, the guide sprang forward with a glad cry.

"Old Avalanche, by all that's holy !" he exclaimed, catching the newcomer's hand and wringing it warmly.

"Yas, yas ; yer correckt, b'yee—correckt as er full moon in fly-time. Et ar' Old Avalanche, the Injun Annihilator, who is a volcaner o' destructiveness, a hail-storm o' demolishen, an' er whirlwind o' terrificosity."

By this time the shrill tones of the eccentric Avalanche had aroused the camp, and the whole of the party came tumbling out of their tents, to ascertain the cause of so much commotion.

It was still quite dark, and only the outlines of the two friends' forms were discernible to the noblemen.

"Hello, there, guide !" shouted Sir Harry as he approached, accompanied by Sir Bruce and Sir Fleming ; "what's the go ?"

"Oh ! nothing much," was the reply. "Come up, I've got a recruit here !"

"A recruit, eh ?" and the gentlemen crowded eagerly around. "What ! a mountaineer ? Jove ; this is luck !"

CHAPTER IV

WILD EDNA DEMANDS TOLL

MORNING dawned clear and warm, and in the first rosy light, the imprisoned party was enabled to view for the first time a genuine northern mountain man—for such was Old Avalanche—from deerskin leggings and beaded moccasins, to his fringed skin hunting-shirt and bearskin cap.

He was of medium stature, with a muscularly developed form, and clean, wiry limbs, and looked to be a person of uncommon strength. Though well along in years, he was still supple and active as a man of forty. His skin was tanned to a dark brown, and his whole face and appearance was as grizzly as grizzly could be. His face was deeply scarred and seamed, his hair was long and tangled, and his eyes were wonderfully brilliant and piercing, considering his age. They seemed capable of reading one's innermost thoughts and secrets. In some affray, he had lost *both ears*, a disfiguration that would render him recognizable in any place or under any circumstances.

His arms were of improved pattern and finish, the rifle being a repeater, and the revolvers in his belt of the Colt make. A bowie and hatchet also hung at his hip, and this completed the outfit of the notable mountaineer and guide.

His reception by the Ladies Milburn was hearty, and Sir Harry and Sir Bruce were no less demonstrative in their joy at his coming. Dan had said much of the prowess, skill and ingenuity of the Annihilator, and now that he had condescended to drop in upon them, all felt that they could rely upon him to extricate them from their present difficulty and danger.

"I dunno about it," was the veteran's reply, when Sir Harry asked him if he felt himself equal to the task of guiding them into a place of safety.

"But there certainly must be some way by which to escape from here. Does not this canyon have an opening at some other point ?"

"Ye've got ther Avalanche thar, b'yee, fer sart'in, 'ca'se I don't eggsactly kno'. Ye see, I nevyar 'splored it any fu'ther'n the Flat Butte, whose base ar' 'bout twenty miles from hayr. Thar mought be another eend to et, then ag'in thar moughtn't."

"Indeed ! How far westward does this range extend ?"

"More or less'n a hundred miles. It's cl'ar twenty on 'em to ther fut o' ole Flat Butte, an' thet ar'n't a sarcumstance ter w'ot's beyond."

"Humph! We are indeed in a trap, then. I almost despair of ever getting back within the bounds of civilization."

"Ye mustn't giv up so easy."

"And why hope, pray?"

"Oh! fer numerous reasons. I'll bet a cart-load o' b'ar-meat that I an' my j'int 'll get you out o' this, afore long!"

"Your j'int?"

"Eggsactly—my j'int—my half-an'-half!"

"I fail to comprehend."

"Eh? Don't see thr'u' et? Wal, that's quare. Ye observe thet my goat thar, ar' a j'int o' the great thunderstarm o' boreal destruction, an' consekently he's a j'int o' ther famuss Avalanche, w'ich same ar' yer 'umble sarvint. He's my goat, is Florence Night-in-a-gale, an' I'm his goatee."

Then, looking to his weapons the eccentric old fellow threw himself on the ground and wiggled off toward the entrance of the canyon, closely and silently followed by his remarkable goat.

The two were absent a greater share of the day, and those in camp were beginning to grow fearful that their stand-by had either deserted them or been captured, when he quietly reappeared among them, accompanied by Florence.

A glance at his grim, anxious face told them that something had happened, which boded them no good.

"What is it, sir?" asked Lady Milburn as she approached him, leaning on the arm of her beautiful daughter. "I trust we are in no immediate danger of being massacred? Coggsell said, only yesterday, that he apprehended no trouble for several days yet."

"Wal, ma'am," was the Annihilator's answer, as he seated himself in a convenient boulder, "that's all to one's way o' thinkin'. As I've obsarved severial times behind, it ginneraley takes two or more parsons to make a bargain. Now, then, I an' my jin't, hyar, Florence Night-in-a-gale, hev been comparin' notes, to-day, an' we've arriv' at ther universal conklusion thet we're goin' to expeerience thunder'n' hot times, pirty soon, near's we kin jedge!"

"What's that?" asked Sir Harry, coming up. "Have you made any alarm-ing discoveries, scout?"

"Alarmin'? Wal, that's jes' as ye luke at the thing. You mought call 'em alarmin', while I called 'em simply 'hot.' Ther pererarey ar' jes' swarmin' wi' red-skins, an' they're preparin' to drive us back inter ther mountains. See hayr, folkses, thar's one thing w'at puzzils me. Ev'ry con-sarned Injun out thar kerries ther calky-lashun 'bout him, thet when they get

you-'uns they'll git swads on swads o' money an' dimunds an' jewels, an' sich like. Thar's white devils 'mong 'em w'at's seen ye up at Dakota City—Idaho Bill an' Red Bill, for instance, who ar' two o' the wu'st cut-throats this side o' perdishen, an' they're a-urgin' on the red niggurs by tellin' 'em w'at lots o' spondulix ye've got. Now, is this so, or is et sum o' them renegades' cussed lyin'?"

Sir Harry and Lady Milburn exchanged glances; then the former replied:

"Yes, it is partly true. We have money and jewels enough about our persons to come to a million dollars if sold in fair markets."

The old man shrugged his shoulders.

"Ye're dumblasted fools fer bringin' 'em out inter this kentry, then," he growled. "Thet, however, ain't none o' my bizness. Ye've got yerselves inter a muss, an' ye must prepare to bear up no matter w'ot 'tarnal diffikilties ye meet. But ernuff o' jaw-waggin'; let's adjourn ter bizness. Saddle an' mount yer hosses, all hands, an' ride fer dear life up ther canyon. Do not stop 'til ter-morrer daybreak ef ye ken keep on. Thet'll fetch ye 'bout ter ther fut o' Flattened Butte. Stop hyar an' wait 'til I j'ine ye!"

"But what do you intend to do?"

"I must steal a hoss frum them Injuns fust. Nevyer feer fur me. I'll cum out top o' the pile."

"Shall we take the tents along?" asked Sir Harry.

"No. Leave 'em whar they ar'. They may keep ther reds from 'speekin' ye've sloped an' keep 'em from attackin' right off."

So the tents were left standing, the horses carefully saddled, packed and mounted, and then, when all was in readiness, the cavalcade dashed off up the gorge, under the guidance of Coggsell, leaving Old Avalanche and Florence sole tenants of the deserted camp.

For hours they rode rapidly on.

Night fell dark and dense over the grand old mountains, for the sky was overcast with menacing black clouds; and still the fugitives urged their steeds through the gloom of the great canyon.

As the first tints of day-dawn were seen to flush against the mountain crests, they came to a halt at the base of that mighty pile of rock and wild grandeur, the Flat Butte.

"Thar, ma'am," said old Dan, doffing his hat respectfully to Lady Milburn, as he nodded upward towards the far-disant peak—"that's ther Flat Butte, up yander, an' ther only pile o' mounting o' that name

in all Dakota; in fact, thar ain't ernuther flat butte short o' ther Black Hills or ther Rockies."

"Oh, Sir Fleming!" exclaimed the lady; "then you must be mistaken. This must be the mountain I am in search of. Oh! sir, do not tell me I am wrong. I must, I will know the truth, and have a search made for my poor, lost Henry's bones. Ay, I will, sir, if we have to search the country over!"

"Nonsense, Hetty; you are getting crazy over this subject. I have told you once that this is *not* the Flat Butte I mean. Is not that enough?"

"No! it is not enough!" cried Sir Harry, sternly. "I now fully believe this to be the peak."

"Take care, young man, how you speak to me, your better. You forget."

"No, I forget nothing; nor do I fear you. If my mother wishes search made, it *shall* be made! Let that be understood."

"It shall *not*, without my consent. Who commands this party, pray?"

"I do—my share of it!" was the retort of the decided young nobleman.

"And what do you claim as *your* part?" sneered Sir Fleming.

"My mother and sister, sir, and our guide, I trust, Sir Tyrant. As to Sir Bruce Lesquik, I do not know whether I can count on him as ally or not."

Sir Bruce smiled a purely French smile, and nodded his head negatively.

"Sir Harry forgets that I owe my support and title to Sir Fleming," he said, in a soft, oily voice. "I should therefore consider *his* wishes above all others."

"Very well," bowed the haughty young peer, coolly; "just as you like. Your room is of more account than your society."

Sir Fleming laughed, evilly.

"I think by the rights of a husband and guardian, I also have the ladies under my control!" he chuckled.

Sir Harry bit his lip savagely, but did not answer. Coggsell, however, spoke for him:

"Enough o' this wranglin', now," he growled, "fer thar's other biz on hand. We're goin' to have visitors."

He pointed on up the canyon to where a large party of horsemen had come in sight through the gloom, and were galloping down toward them. They were all attired in the garb of mountain-men, were armed with polished rifles, revolvers and knives, and wore crape veils as masks over the upper portion of their faces.

But, most strange of all, they were headed by a *woman*—a young and beautiful creature, with skin of creamy whiteness, pure and

classic features, eyes like stars in their brightness, and hair of nut-brown colour, which hung to her waist in a mass of wild confusion.

She was mounted upon a superior black charger, adorned with gay and elegant trappings, and sat her saddle with the ease and grace of a finished equestrienne.

"But, who is it?—who are they?" asked Sir Harry.

"Ther femayel is Wild Edna, the Girl Bandit, an' them others ar' her backers—as wild an' fearless a set o' devils as ever chawed le'd!" replied Coggsell.

"What! a girl-bandit? that beauteous girl a bandit? Impossible, sir!"

"No, et ain't nuthin' o' the kind. Jes wait a bit an' ye'll see fer yerself."

At the guide's command all the men cocked and raised their rifles, and as the newcomers came within speaking distance, old Dan sang out:

"Halt or we fire!"

Wild Edna addressed her followers then, and they drew up in form across the canyon, while she, affixing a white 'kerchief to the end of her rifle, rode fearlessly forward.

"What do you want?" demanded Sir Fleming, as she rode within a few rods and drew rein. "What and who are you?"

A smile irradiated the maiden's face as she eyed every one among the party, and then replied:

"Your ponderous lordship, I have the honour of introducing myself as Wild Edna, the Girl Bandit. Those I left behind me are my men. May I make bold to inquire what brought you into Devil's Canyon?"

"We were driven hither by the Indians," replied Sir Harry, eyeing the vision of beauty before him with undisguised admiration.

"By the Indians, eh? Well, that is no uncommon occurrence, for we often see parties of hunters, trappers and explorers caged in this same trap. I suppose it is your desire to pass on through the canyon and get out of these mountains, is it not?"

"Most assuredly, if there is possibility of such an escape."

"You are then, doubtless, prepared to pay the toll without delay, so that you can earlier take your departure?"

"The toll?"

"The toll. Every person who passes the Flat Butte by the gateway of the Devil's Canyon is required to pay a toll, the same being any amount I may see fit to exact. On consideration of its payment in gold or greenbacks, my followers see that you are guarded safely on through the mountains

and started *en route* for the nearest post of civilization."

"What toll do you require," asked Sir Harry, "before you pass us on?"

"Well, that depends. Let me see—there are six of you, and I see that all of you save the guide sport diamonds—a fact that tells me your wealth is great. Of what nationality are you?"

"All, except two, are English. Sir Bruce here, is a French Canadian, and the guide a Yank!"

"Very well. The toll, then, shall be *six thousand dollars*—one thousand a head!"

CHAPTER V

OLD AVALANCHE ON THE RAMPAGE

AFTER the cavalcade was out of sight up the ravine or canyon, Old Avalanche began to fix things around in camp, in such a manner as would lead the savages to suppose all the party were still there. He found several blankets in the tents, and wrapping these about suitable broken limbs that were strewn about, he manufactured some quite creditable dummies, which were put in position near the mouth of the gorge. After arranging everything quite to his satisfaction, he stationed the goat near the entrance to watch, while he threw himself upon the ground and was soon off in a sound and refreshing slumber, from which he did not waken until the shadows of night had enveloped the earth.

Then, after calling in Florence by a shrill whistle, he ate a few bits of dried bear-meat, after which he was ready for the war-path.

Out on the prairie he could see the glow of many camp-fires, and from these he guessed that the reds were not to attack the camp that night, or, if at all, not until a late hour.

After carefully examining his weapons, and bidding Florence to lie down and watch the camp, he slung his rifle behind his back, threw himself on all-fours, and crept out of the mouth of the canyon. Once outside, he came to a momentary halt and cautiously gazed about. All around him lay spread out a panorama of wildness, life and grandeur. Down across the almost limitless plain, were the lights of twinkling camp-fires, which there lit up the starless night like open day; the moving of hundreds of dusky figures, the neighing of horses and the guttural shouts of men, told that there was the Indian camp.

After several moments' scrutiny, Old Avalanche became satisfied on two points.

One was that there was a large increase in numbers since his previous visit, and the other was that there were not less than a dozen sentinels concealed in the grass, very close to where he was crouching.

To get beyond their lines without attracting attention he well knew was impossible; but beyond he was determined to go, if he had to wade through a whole regiment of them.

So, tightening his belt, and drawing his keen-edged bowie, he crawled carefully on, making scarcely any sound or stir among the high grass. Presently he suddenly paused.

Right in front of him he heard a rustle, which betokened the presence of a savage. Had the red-skin discovered him? For fully half a minute the scout paused in doubt; but, as all was again silence, he thrust the blade of his knife between his teeth, and began to wriggle slowly backward.

This retreat, however, was of but short duration for he soon came to another halt.

There were enemies *coming up in his rear!*

"One of 'em's Idaho Bill," he muttered, as the loud, brawling voice of one of the newcomers floated out on the air. "Darn his black hide, et won't do fer him ter git his peepers on ther Averlanche—ther boreal breeze o' destructiveness, or thar'll be miracles to pay. I opine et would be healthy to slope."

In retreating from where he supposed the sentinel to be lying, it had been the scout's plan to gather himself up and, by a succession of handsprings, land plump on top on his enemy; but a glance, now, warned him that this would be impossible on account of the approach of Idaho Bill and his companions; so he once more crawled ahead toward the concealed red-skin. He experienced no difficulty in obtaining his former position, where he paused and grasped his knife in a firm hand.

Then he listened. There was no noise ahead. The next instant, the Annihilator gathered himself up and made a fierce lunge ahead through the grass, to where he believed the savage was lying.

But, great was his mistake.

No savage was there, and his long knife was plunged to the hilt in the earth. Ere he could withdraw it, he heard a chuckling grunt, and wheeled about just in time to avoid the blow from a hurtling tomahawk, hurled from the hands of a giant savage, not six yards away.

In another instant the two had sprang to each other's embrace, and were locked in a desperate war-hug. Over and over

they rolled through the rustling grass, writhing, twisting and squirming, but emitting no sound save what was caused by their movements, each determined to crush the other in his terrible hug.

The Annihilator was knifeless, but still had his revolvers, but clasped in that terrible hug he could not draw either weapon. The red-skin still possessed his knife, but was likewise powerless to use it.

So the struggle depended alone upon craft and strength.

The red-skin was gradually warming up to his work, and bent all his energies toward retaining his position on the upper side. And, though the scout fought desperately against this, he was doomed to defeat, for, ere he was scarce aware of the fact, the savage had wrenched himself from his hold, turned him under, and pinioned him securely to the ground as in the grip of a vice.

So astonished was Old Avalanche that for a few moments he was rendered speechless. Never before had he been so easily conquered by one of the hated red-skin race. The grinning captor seemed to divine his thoughts for he said :

"Ugh ! white dog much heap big brave ; kill many Sioux. Running Antelope too much stout for 'im, dough. He take great brave to Rain-in-the-Face, an' dey burn him at stake !"

"Ye will, hey ? Ye'll take ther enormous Norweegjan avalanche ter yer camp, will ye, an' roast him in ther Soo fryin' skillet, will ye ?"

"Ugh ! yes. Rain-in-the-Face he heap glad to see the No-Ear brave. Let the No-Ear listen. The white chief is coming, and he will help Antelope bind his prisoner."

Old Avalanche's heart now sank within him, for he heard the tramp of many feet and the loud murmur of approaching voices that told him Idaho Bill and his companions were coming up. Once more he struggled fiercely to free himself, but all in vain. Running Antelope had him where he could hold him firmly.

"Ugh !" he chuckled—"can't no git away." But he spoke not the truth, then.

Scarcely had the words left his lips when there came upon his hearing the shrill bleat of a goat, and the next instant the form of Florence Nightingale shot meteor-like through the air, and the Antelope became the recipient of a tremendous bunt in the back that shut him up like a jack-knife, and wholly broke his hold upon the scout.

Old Avalanche leaped to his feet with alacrity and darted away into the darkness, for the red-skin's howls instantly brought a swarm of his comrades to the spot ; and

it was not safe to linger thereabouts longer. Florence meekly followed, and in a few moments the two were out of the reach of immediate danger.

Here the old man halted and took in his bearings, after which he started off in the direction of the corral, which lay some two miles distant to the northeast.

In order to reach it he was obliged to make a circuit of the entire camp, that was now awakened and on the alert ; for, by the magic system of Indian telegraphy, the news had been transmitted to every camp-fire of the scout's escape. But to a man as thoroughly experienced as the Annihilator, this was merely play, and in the course of half an hour he and his faithful "j'int" were close in the vicinity of the corral. This was about fifty rods from any camp-fire, and the animals were guarded by four mounted braves, each well armed.

The red-skin nearest to where Old Avalanche and Florence were crouching, was a stalwart young warrior, and was mounted upon a clean-limbed, fiery Texan horse of a jet black colour.

As he gazed at the handsome warrior and the magnificent horse, a desperate resolve entered the Annihilator's mind.

He would obtain possession of that animal, or something more than a common "scrimmage" would prove a failure. With it, and he on its back, it would be no trick at all to dash back into the Devil's Canyon, from whence he would follow and join the advancing party.

Bidding Florence to lie down, the scout scrawled stealthily forward through the grass, and after some time reached a position directly behind the guard's steed, and so close that he could touch its haunches with his hand. Then he rose softly to his feet. The brave was still unmindful of the presence of an enemy.

For several moments Old Avalanche softly stroked the hairy haunches of the horse to quiet him, for, on the scout's rising he had appeared restive. Then placing his two hands firmly on the animal's hips, he made an agile spring and landed squarely upon his back behind the sentinel, around whom he flung his arms in a steel-like embrace.

The horse reared, and snorted with terror, and then dashed away wildly, bearing straight down into the swarming camp.

CHAPTER VI

A SPECTRE ON THE SUMMIT

ALL, even Coggsell the guide, put up their hands in astonishment at the amount demanded by the Girl Bandit. They had imagined her toll would not exceed a few dollars, consequently the sum named seemed almost an incredible fee.

"Zounds!" cried Sir Fleming; "do you imagine we are made of money? Your impudence is astounding! Had I a suitable whip I would chastise you."

A merry peal of laughter from Wild Edna showed how this little speech affected her. Evidently she was as fearless as she was beautiful.

"Who are you, lady?" asked Sir Harry, respectfully. "We seldom see females of your surpassing loveliness the master of such a dangerous and romantic situation."

"True, Sir Inquisitiveness; but who I am, and what are my antecedents, concerns you not, that I see. My business here is to collect the toll for passing through this canyon, and not to divulge my secrets and history to utter strangers."

Her voice was now cold and haughty.

Sir Harry flushed a trifle, and bit his lip to keep back a hot reply. Her retort had dampened his ardour more than he would have dared to own.

Then, turning to the Girl Bandit, he continued:

"Well, what are you waiting for?"

"For six thousand dollars," was the cool, unconfused answer.

"Indeed! You can go, then, for you will get no such a sum out of *me*!" said Sir Harry.

"May I presume to inquire, then, what you *will* do? You can go no farther in this direction without paying the toll."

"You forget we are armed, and capable of fighting our way through!" ventured Sir Bruce, sneeringly.

"Scarcely through such odds as my band. I command full sixty brave men. What could you hope to do against them?"

"Not much, it is true. Nevertheless, I, for one, will not submit to being swindled thus out of a thousand dollars. I refuse to pay you a single dollar!"

"Likewise, I!" growled Sir Fleming.

"And I!" from Sir Harry.

"And I!" grinned old Dan. "This chicken's bin bankrupt these five years."

"Very well. If this is your final decision, gentlemen, I suppose it includes your ladies as well as yourselves."

"It does."

"Then I will bid you adieu. Make no attempt to go farther up the canyon, or you will be riddled with bullets. These are stern laws, but they are such as bind the banditti of Devil's Canyon together. You have refused to pay the toll. To-morrow, next day, and the next I will visit you and request its payment. If you refuse each time, you will not be dunned again!"

"Indeed. Then, I suppose you will adopt harsher measures?"

"Yes. The laws of the brotherhood will then grant you ten days to escape from the canyon, by the route you came, if you can fight through a legion of red-skins. On the morn of the eleventh day the flood-gates of Lake Tico, a sheet of water in the peaks of this range and connecting with Devil's Canyon, will be removed and its water will sweep all that blocks its path, in this place, away!"

Then the beautiful commander turned her horse's head, touched him with her jewelled whip, and galloped back to the band. After a short consultation they soon all dashed away up the canyon and quickly disappeared among its numerous curves.

After they were out of sight Sir Harry turned to Coggsell.

"Well, it is done with now, I suppose. What are your views on the subject, old man?"

Dan shook his head dubiously.

"Ye've got me," he replied, slowly. "I don't know no more what ter do nor does a new born babe!"

"Then there is no way we can get out of here except by retreating or going ahead, eh?"

"None's I knows on. I opine we'd better camp down hyar, 'cordin' ter Avalanche's orders, an' wait fer him tew come up."

Dan then dismounted, while the others followed his example. The canyon was carpeted with an abundance of grass at this point, and after the animals were picketed out to graze, the guide set about arranging the camp. As but one hour's sunlight penetrated the bottom, it was quite chilly even in midday, so a roaring fire was kindled out of cones and brushwood.

The day passed slowly away.

While the others were lounging about camp, Dan shouldered his rifle and scoured the sides of the canyon in hopes of finding some break that would permit them to escape from the impending danger; but vain the search; the giant walls towered frowningly aloft, unbroken, and uninviting. No break in their face would admit of the passage of a human being.

Their camp was directly at the base and

in the shadow of the giant Flat Butte. Any person standing on its summit could drop a pebble into camp, and kill a man as easily as to fling a stone. So argued Sir Fleming, and he requested that the camp be removed farther up the gorge.

The guide went off to see how near were Wild Edna's guards, and soon returned with the news that a single guard was posted a mile farther up the canyon.

"But I'll wager thar's slathers more on 'em cluss by," he said by way of conclusion.

The camp was accordingly transferred several hundred yards to the western side of the mountain, and out of such danger as Sir Fleming had apprehended.

At last night fell over the peaks, and preparations were made to "turn in."

All were more or less anxious about the non-appearance of Old Avalanche, except Sir Fleming and Sir Bruce.

They were apparently unconcerned; or at least, they did not seem to care whether he returned or not.

"It is possible he may have been captured by the Indians," suggested Lady Maude, as they all stood grouped around the crackling camp-fire.

"Y-a-s, et's possible, an' that's erbout all. I tell ye it takes a red-skin wi' a cast-iron he'd ter take ther Annihilator, all alone. I've knowed ov his escapin' from ther red warmints w'en they hed him all ready to roast—I hev, by gum. He's jes' as slippery as an eel, an' hes got as many lives as er spotted tom-cat."

After a few more words, the ladies retired to their tent, the noblemen threw themselves down near the fire to sleep, and Dan went on guard.

He made a tour up and down the canyon, but failed to discover any signs of prowlers. Doubtless the Indians had not yet penetrated the gorge, and as for the bandits, they probably meditated no mischief; so all was safe for the present.

Returning to camp the faithful fellow seated himself near the fire to ponder over the strange position into which he had been thrown.

But his eyes grew heavy, and despite his efforts to keep awake he soon fell fast asleep.

The hours rolled by.

The camp-fire burned low and the canyon was filled with dense shadows. In her tent, Lady Milburn was restless and wakeful. Her thoughts were of such a nature that she could not repose. Lady Maude lay beside her, sleeping sweetly, but my lady could not enjoy the same peaceful blessing.

"I have a foreboding of coming danger,"

she murmured, as she at last arose to a half-sitting position, and peered around her. "I wonder what it means? Can the Indians be creeping upon us!"

Through an aperture in the blankets, a faint glimmer of light from the expiring fire shone into the tent.

Instinctively my lady drew her jewelled watch from its place in her belt.

The hour was midnight; the camp and the awful mountain solitude were hushed in slumber.

Casting a shawl about her shoulders, and rising to her feet, she stepped from the tent and stood in the open air.

All of the men lay prone upon the grass, sound asleep, save old Dan; for, though he was lost in unconsciousness, he retained an upright, sitting position, his knotty hands clasped over the muzzle of his pet rifle.

So peacefully was he sleeping that Lady Milburn could not bear to disturb him.

She shivered a trifle at the crisp mountain air, and drew closer to the fire. Then, involuntarily, she raised her eyes toward the top of the frowning Flat Butte. As she did so, she gave a low, stifled cry.

Great Heaven! What was this she saw? Was she dreaming, or was it reality?

The summit was illuminated by a mighty bonfire, which lit up the northern sky to a blood-red glow. Standing at the edge overlooking the canyon was a tall, spectral figure, clothed in snowy white, with a beard of the same colour that reached nearly to his feet.

In his hand he held an instrument resembling a baton, and he was wildly waving this to and fro, while faintly downward on the breeze floated the strains of a weird chant.

With dilated eyes, Lady Milburn watched and listened. Then suddenly the spectral figure seemed to see her, for he ceased his song and pointed one long menacing finger down toward her, as if in terrible anger. She grew deathly faint and endeavoured to collect her senses. But her head swam wildly, her limbs refused to support her, and with an awful, piercing shriek she sank upon the ground, insensible.

CHAPTER VII

"THE THUNDER-STORM O' DESTRUCTION" BURSTETH FORTH

ON—on, leaped the frightened horse, on whose back were the two struggling men—Avalanche endeavouring to get his enemy's knife into a fatal spot, the savage desperately writhing and twisting to get free.

Finally, however, he gave a gurgling gasp, and leaned back in the scout's arms. He was dead.

Skilfully disengaging his feet from the stirrups, Old Avalanche permitted him to topple off into the grass, and then he was master of the horse.

By this time he was right in the camp, and as it would be useless to attempt retreat, he urged on the flying steed by pricking it with his knife-point, and away they rushed straight down through camp-fires and clumps of Indians like a hurricane wind.

Shrieks of surprise and anger went up from a hundred throats, and high above all roared the stentorian voice of the dauntless scout.

On—on, dashed the spirited horse and his more spirited rider—on like the wind, and still the surging swarm of red-skins grew denser and thicker.

Suddenly Old Avalanche made a discovery that had hitherto escaped his notice. A roaring camp-fire was burning in the entrance to the canyon. Forms, tall and grim, stood in its light, and he knew they were Indians.

Still, he was determined to break through their ranks, if such an act were possible, and gain the gorge beyond.

On he sped, through the heart of the camp, and, strange to say, as soon as the wily red-men became convinced that he was heading for the canyon, not a hand was raised to stop him. Instead, the screaming horde closed in after him, and followed, yelling at his horse's heels.

At first he was unable to comprehend their motive, but not long, however, was he to be left in a state of doubt.

As he approached the entrance he made the startling discovery that the mouth of the canyon was *crammed full of painted savages* through whom no man or beast could for a moment hope to break. Plainly he was in an Indian trap.

The over-exultant demons were yelling in his face, at his back, and on either side of him. Swarms of the dancing and screeching imps were crowding up from every hand.

Escape seemed an impossibility.

Old Avalanche reined in his steed, and glared about him as does a hunted tiger when at bay.

Should he yield and allow himself to be taken a prisoner, or, worse still, be slaughtered, then and there?

No! a hundred times, no.

It was not the nature of the old man to willingly give up. There must be a struggle first, and in that struggle more than one Sioux dog would bite the dust.

He set his teeth together with a click, and replacing the knife in his belt, drew and cocked his two handsome revolvers, one of which he held ready in each hand, for instant use.

Nearer and nearer trotted the savages. They well knew the desperate character with whom they had to deal. They all had either met or heard of him and his prowess, and they knew he never pulled a trigger on the same man, *twice*!

The Sioux came to a halt just out of rifle range, and appeared to hesitate.

The figure of the splendid horse and its watchful rider, as they remained outlined against the firelit sky, looked a formidable object to attack.

In the midst of this hesitation, two figures were trying to urge on the painted hell-hounds.

One was a brawny Indian chief, who wore his hair down over his shoulder—an evil, brutal-looking fellow, with eyes as red as fire, and lips thick and flabby like a negro's. You ask who is this? No one who has seen the notorious chief, Crazy Horse, once would need to ask. Once seen he is not easily to be forgotten. The other man is a half-breed associate whose name is Idaho Bill—or William Cummings. This well-suited pair are urging on the savages, by curses and threats.

Finally, the two chiefs succeeded in animating their warriors. They came stealthily on, watching the scout in half-terror and rage. He seemed so cool, that they could but admire, hate, and fear him all at the same time.

It was understood throughout the horde, that Old Avalanche was to be taken alive. The scout, himself, easily guessed this, else he would have been shot down before.

But if they counted on an easy victory, they were greatly mistaken.

No sooner was the flash of a pistol to be seen than the Annihilator commenced a destructive fire to the right, left and in front, and for every shot he aimed, an Indian fell.

"Take him alive!" shouted a voice from the background. "Take him alive!"

A grim, defiant smile flitted across the features of the Annihilator, as he heard these words. No sooner had he emptied the chambers of his revolvers, than, by a deft movement, he *extracted them, and replaced them by duplicate chambers, filled with cartridges*!

Consequently he was again ready for business. Crack! crack! went the weapons. now aimed toward the weakest

spot in the enemy's ranks, and every shot told with deadly effect.

Involuntarily the astounded red-skins shrank to one side, making an opening to the prairies beyond. This was what the scout had anticipated, and he urged his horse on.

Suddenly one brave bolder than the rest, and a perfect giant in size, sprang forward and seized the flying scout by the leg, to which he firmly clung, and attempted to unseat him. At first Old Avalanche nearly lost his equilibrium, but he managed to keep in the saddle and finish discharging his pistols. Then he quickly thrust them into his belt, and drew his knife.

The red Hercules tugging at his leg seemed determined not to let go; his grip was like a vice. The flying horse had now borne them out of the midst of the savages into the savanna beyond the fires.

Grasping the saddle-bow, with one hand for support, the scout made a parry at the red-skin's wrists, and though he cut them to the bone, the desperate brave still clung on, and, by a mighty jerk, succeeded in hurling his victim off onto the ground.

Ere Old Avalanche could clear himself, the horse had dashed away.

"Cuss ye!" he gritted, pinioning the savage to the ground, "I'll l'arn ye w'ot et ar' to blockade er Norweegjan avalanche, ye copper-hued hippopotamus. Take thet!"

He buried his knife in the naked bosom, and the next instant had leaped to his feet and was away through the darkness.

The whole horde were now swarming after him in mad pursuit.

He must have a horse, or vain would be the attempt to escape. The enemy could chase him down ere he could run half a mile. So he shaped his course toward the corral, whither the horses were guarded.

The savages anticipated him, and before he was scarcely aware of it, he beheld a dozen sweeping down upon him.

Had they discovered him? He did not wait to see, but threw himself in the tall grass and crept with great alacrity out of their path.

With beating heart he awaited the result. Would they pass by?

No! they had seen him, and were once more shaping their course toward where he was crouching.

Concealment was now of no further use, so he sprang to his feet and leaped determinedly on.

As he ran he loaded both of his revolvers with fresh cartridges, and retained them in either hand for ready use.

On—on he leaped, silently and desper-

ately, his feet scarcely touching the ground, so light was he of step.

On—on; then suddenly he stumbled over some object which was lying in the grass, and fell prostrate. But he was on foot again, in a twinkling, and dashing swiftly away.

Next, he heard a noise directly at his heels, as if somebody was dogging him. With a growl of desperation, he drew back the hammer of one of the revolvers, and wheeled about.

As he did so there came to his hearing a familiar "ba-a-a," and Florence Nightingale came bounding joyfully up.

"Hello, ole boy," saluted the scout, with an appreciative grin. "So ye're a-kickin', hey? Wal, kim erlong. Things ar' kinder brisk, jes' now, so we'll nessessarily hev ter git!"

Once more he turned and darted on, the affectionate and knowing goat bringing up the rear. On came the savages yelling with triumph.

On, for five moments more; then the dauntless Annihilator stopped, stock-still. He saw now, the cause of their yells of triumph. There were mounted Indians in front, behind and on either side of him; *he was perfectly surrounded!*

CHAPTER VIII

JOSIAH HOGG, ESQ.

LADY MILBURN'S scream brought the camp to their feet in a jiffy. Dan Coggsell was the first to spring to her side, to be immediately followed by Sir Harry, Bruce and Fleming.

The insensible woman was borne to the light of the camp-fire, and the old guide procured a hatful of water and dashed it into her face.

"I wonder w'at ked've skeer'd her?" he said. "My nostrils don' scent Injuns, or I shed say she seen one!"

"There may be prowlers around," replied Sir Harry, uneasily. "Perhaps it would be well for you to scout about the neighbourhood, and learn for certain."

Dan accordingly seized his rifle and set out into the gloom, while the others set about restoring Lady Milburn to consciousness. In the midst of the efforts Lady Maude came flying out of her tent.

"Mamma, mamma; where is she?" she cried, in anguish. "She is gone!"

Then as her gaze fell upon the prostrate and apparently lifeless form, she burst into a flood of tears.

"Be quiet," said Sir Harry, soothingly.

"Mother has only fainted. Something has frightened her!"

After several applications of water, her ladyship gave signs of returning consciousness, and then with a sudden spasm and gasp, she gave vent to a stifled cry, and sat bolt upright.

Her face was very pale and her eyes wild and burning with an unnatural fire. The moment she was fully awakened to the knowledge of her situation, she shuddered violently, and to the crest of the mighty Flat Butte turned her horrified gaze. Great Heaven! *it was gone!*

No longer was the spectral figure standing at the edge of the precipice; all traces of the blood-red bonfire had disappeared, and the summit was enveloped in its mantle of impenetrable gloom.

"Oh! Henry, Henry!" she cried in piteous accents, "why did you come back to haunt me—to drive me almost mad with despair?"

"My dear," said Sir Fleming, advancing, "what gave you affright? What caused you to faint?"

She shuddered, as he laid his hand upon her shoulder.

"What did I see?" she repeated, turning on him almost savagely—"what did I see, to cause me to swoon away? I will tell you. On the crest of yon mountain-top, wrapped in a halo of glory, I saw the spirit of your victim—of my poor, long-lost husband, Sir Henry. I begin to understand you more than I did at first—to comprehend your baseness and treachery. You told me this was *not* the mountain-top from which Sir Henry fell. You *lied!* His accusing spirit came back to give proof of your lie!"

Sir Fleming turned red and white by turns, but finally managed to emit a harsh, sarcastic laugh.

"You are demented, Hetty," he replied, with a dubious shake of his head. "I was a fool for ever permitting you to come out on this wild-goose chase. Each day is increasing your mania, and by the time we get back to England, if we *ever do*, you will have to go into a private asylum!"

Again she turned toward him, her dark eyes blazing with indignation.

"And *you* will place me there?"

"I will place you there!"

"You *will not!*" cried Sir Harry, pushing the baronet back, and standing between him and Lady Milburn. "You forget that I am here to defend her!"

"No, young man, I forget nothing. But, mind you, *I* am master of that woman, so step aside, or it will be the worse for you."

But Sir Harry folded his hands proudly across his breast, and glared at the other fearlessly.

"Come on!" he said, coolly. "I am ready to protect the mother that gave me birth, against you or a score more of your stamp. You are a tyrant, a coward, and a designing knave, and I defy you!"

"You shall pay dearly for all these insults, my young hotspur!" he hissed as he turned on his heel, and began pacing to and fro in front of the fire.

"I fear you not, Sir Fleming," was the cool rejoinder; then Sir Harry returned to his mother.

"Now, mother, tell me the cause of your faint."

"I can tell you nothing, Harry, except what I told him. A short time ago I left my tent, for I could not sleep, and came out here into the open air. You were all asleep, even the guide, and so I did not disturb you till I fainted. While I stood here by the fire, my gaze involuntarily wandered to the top of yonder peak. Then, oh! such a sight I beheld! The whole summit was aglow with the glare of a blood-red bonfire, which burned on the top. At the edge, stood *it*, Harry—the spirit of my poor husband and your and Maudie's father."

"But, mother, you have imagined all this. You must have been walking in your sleep and dreamed all this absurdity."

"It is not absurd, my son; nothing but the truth. I was as wide awake as you are now, and beheld the spectre as clearly as I now behold you."

"Oh! Harry, are you, too, losing faith in me—you too turning from me in this hour of need?" she groaned, piteous tears standing in her eyes.

"No, dearest, sweetest mother, no!" he cried, clasping her impulsively to his breast. "I will not desert or disbelieve in you. I will do all a son can do, to aid in the last sad rites due my poor lost father. If it be within the power of man, I will recover the bones that have been bleaching in Death Gulch these twenty years, and inter them in the ancient vaults of Lynnwood."

"Do this, my own true son," sobbed her ladyship, "and I will bless you—God will bless you. I shall then be ready to die."

The remainder of the night passed away rapidly; Sir Fleming and his confidant, Sir Bruce, were talking, apart, to themselves, as also were Lady Milburn and her two children.

About day-dawn, old Dan returned and reported that there were no signs of Indian intruders to be discovered yet. The

canyon was clear as far as he had been able to penetrate.

When Sir Harry related to him the story told by Lady Milburn, he nodded his old shaggy head comprehensively, and went on about preparing the breakfast, making no comment on it.

After breakfast he took an axe and bade Sir Harry follow him. He led the way down the canyon for about a mile, after which he came to a halt, and pointed upward into the precipitous wall of rock, on the northern side of the gorge. Far up, there was just discernible a round black hole in the rock, scarcely large enough to admit of the passage of a man's body.

"Ye perceive et, eh?" grinned the guide.

"Yes," replied Sir Harry. "But what of it? 'Tis twenty feet high."

"Exactly, an' thar's a big fat b'ar in thet same hoel."

"How know you that?"

"I see'd him, las' nite. He war standin' at ther entrance, up thar, an' grinnin' down at me as if he'd like ter ann'int his jaws on me. 'So,' sez I, 'my fine feller, I'm goin' ter 'n'int mine on ye,' an' hyar I am reddy fer ther job."

"Now, ye git yer 'peater reddy, an' when I git ther ax ter choppin' 'g'in' ther rock, Mr. B'ar will show his head, up yander. You must then plug erway at him, full tilt."

Advancing to the rock, the guide gave three or four resounding whacks upon it with the axe; then scampered back from beneath the hole.

The next instant there was a savage growl, and Bruin came lumbering to the mouth of his retreat, to ascertain the cause of the disturbance.

Sir Harry fired simultaneously with his appearance, and sent a well-directed bullet square into the left eye.

"Good!" cried Dan, as the monster came tumbling down to the ground quite dead.

"Thet was a fine shot."

The bear, which proved to be a male, was conveyed back to camp.

About noon, Wild Edna was seen coming down the canyon at a leisurely gallop, and drew up at the camp-fire around which all of the occupants were sitting.

"Good-morning," she said, as she surveyed the group critically, while her fair hand toyed with her horse's mane. "I hope this sunrise finds you all well and enjoying yourselves."

"All well," replied Sir Harry, smiling rather grimly, "but hardly in a mood for enjoyment. Our situation is not conducive to pleasure."

"Probably not. That, however, is not my fault. You should pay your toll and leave for parts more agreeable."

"We should *not* submit to such an imposition—more, *will not*!"

"Oh! of course you have a perfect right to consult your own notion about that. If you value the superfluous stock of money you have, and the diamonds you wear, more than you do your life, so be it. I would not sell *my* life, I'm sure, for all the wealth on the continent!"

"Yet you are periling it for money!"

"No, I am not. I am just as free from danger of death as can be imagined."

"How so?"

"Because no one will dare to insure their *own* death, by taking *my* life!"

"So? Well, for instance, suppose that I were to shoot you, now, or otherwise make way with you, what would be the result?"

"If I did not return to my home inside of an hour, my men are given to understand that harm has befallen me. They would mount, sweep down upon you, and hack you to pieces—tear you limb from limb. They would not even stop to question you as to what had become of me, so great would be their rage."

"They must be a pack of demons, then!"

"I hope they will never have cause to attack you and thereby prove themselves such."

"Probably they never will have."

After a little further talk, Wild Edna said:

"You then still refuse to pay the toll?"

"Yes—a thousand times, yes. Understand me, lady, that it is not the greed for gold that causes this refusal, but a sense of honour and proper regard for what is due to law and principle. As gentlemen we must refuse!"

Wild Edna then wheeled her horse, and galloped off up the ravine.

The afternoon dragged slowly on, and all except Sir Harry drowsed away, before the camp-fire. There was nothing they could do to better their situation, so they concluded it policy to take things as easy as circumstances would permit. In all probability, Old Avalanche had deserted them, and they had nothing to hope for from any quarter.

About an hour before sunset, all were aroused by the sound of a voice, singing a jangling snatch of outlandish song, and the tramp of horses' feet; then, gazing up the canyon toward the banditti's retreat, it at once was perceivable that they were about to have a visitor—and such a visitor!

A scrawny, vicious-looking mule was leisurely approaching camp, on whose bony back sat a long, lank and lean individual, whose general appearance might have provoked a smile among the most sober crowd of spectators.

He was undeniably a mixture of the old school of Yankees and Kentuckians, with a sprinkling of both Texas and Missouri in his make-up. His attire consisted of a variety of garments, ranging all the way from the soiled checkered pantaloons and heavy brogans to the untanned wolf-skin shirt and squirrel-skin cap. A flaming yellow neck-tie encircled his throat, and a gay red-white-and-blue sash about his waist contained an enormous pair of horse-pistols and a bowie of formidable dimensions. These, with a huge musket strapped to his back, were his only weapons.

He had apparently not seen the camp yet, for as he jogged along he was gazing at the mammoth walls on either side of him, while he sang, in a loud, cracked voice:

"Said I ter Sally Hotchkiss,
Said Sally unter me—
Said Sally's dad an' Sally's mam,
Said all ther tribe ter me—
'Bill, ye ar' a great 'un;
Ter fame's pinnerkle ye'll rise;
Ye'll be er whoppin' poet,
An' great at gospel truth."

"Whoa up, Prudence, thar; w'ot's ahead?"

The latter exclamation, as the eccentric traveller caught sight of the camp.

"Great cow-bells o' Milton an' Longfeller. Ef thar ain't a camp rite yar, ye kin shave me wi' yer toe-nails. Ha-a-a-y, thayr, strangers, hello! Howdy do!"

"Purty hevvy, at yer sarvice. How's yersel', Christian?" replied old Dan.

"Waal, I'm on ern average. Jedge ye hain't got no 'jection ef a feller war ter squat down among ye, hey?"

"Nary a 'jection. Cum along up an' let's inspeck ye."

In a moment more the camp was reached, and raising a long leg over the mule's back the stranger stood upon the ground.

When standing he was about six feet six, and as comical a looking human as the spectators had ever been so unlucky as to meet.

"By thunder, ye're a sight, *you* are!" said Dan, as he finished his inspection. "Who in Cain are ye, ole hoss?"

"That, my Christian friend, I am fortunately *able* to tell ye. I flourish under ther holt o' Josiah William Hogg, E-s-q., at

yer sarvice—Hogg spelt wi' tew G's efye'd jes' 's l'eve."

"An' why wi' two G's?"

"Becawse et hes bin' ther priveledges o' my ancestors ter call themselves Hogg, fer w'ich I ain't ter blaine. Fustly they spelt it H-o-g, Hog. But, as, ef a feller's goin' ter be a hog at tall he may's well go et 'hull hog or none,' I konkluded tew adopt *tew* G's!"

"Ye're travellin' or goin' sumwhar, I take it."

"Yas, I guess so. My proffessyun leeds me everywhar. Sir, I am a *poet*—a descendant from ther great an' immortal Shakespeare—a secont cuzzin o' Longfeller an' an an't ter Byron o' Linn; I am Josiah Billiam Hogg, esquire, at yer sarvice:—Hogg wi' two G's!"

CHAPTER IX

THE POET O' THE NOR'WEST—GONE!

A GENERAL laugh followed, and Josiah Hogg was forthwith made welcome to the camp.

"Much 'quainted 'bout these diggin's?" asked old Dan, as he helped the visitor to a huge slice of bear-meat.

"Waal, y-a-s;—'bout on an average. Ye recommember this 'ere division o' ther erquaitor ar' renowned fur ets poetry o' grace an' motion, so I've tuk more'n ordinary pains ter cultyvate a thorough knowledge o' et. Every darn thing ye see or meet wi', out hayr is chock-full o' poetry. Now, fur instance, hayr's these big heep o' rock, vulgarly called mounting. Thar's sumthin' sublime an' cow-inspiring erbout thet uphcevyal o' granite an' lavy. As Milton sed tew old Jonas Snatcher, w'en they war killin' hogs;—not H-o-g-g-s—but H-o-g-s; as Milton war sayin':

"Friend, thee, o' Jonas Snatcher
Wilt thou becum a watcher?
Jist behold thet grand *finale*
Ther poetry in thet porker's tail."

"Whar kin ye beet thet, now? Jist onsarve ther path-hoss in thet rine."

"Very original poetry, that," said Sir Bruce; "but as you have favoured us with quite enough for the present, suppose you tell us how you got past the banditti."

"The *banditter*?"

"Exactly; the outlaws that infest this canyon."

"Ye wanter kno' ef I kim thr'u' ther canyon an' see'd a banditter?"

"Yes; go on!"

"Waal, I didn't see a livin' banditter—shave me wi' a barn-shovel ef I did!"

"Impossible! You could not have come through the canyon without having been stopped by them."

"I didn't cum thr'u'."

"Didn't come *through*? How then?"

"I *slid over*!"

"How do you make that out?"

"Why, I an' Prudence Cordelia thar rid down on a streak o' greased lightnin'."

Sir Bruce turned away in disgust. He had exhausted his patience and failed with a man, who, it was plain to see, was "nobody's fool." It began to be pretty evident that the visitor was not so "green" as he appeared.

Accordingly, no more efforts were made to pry into his secrets, all trusting that he would explain whenever he felt in the right mood.

The night came on and during the evening Josiah kept the camp in a continual titter with his horrible efforts at poetry, he quoting bad Shakespeare and Longfellow by the yard.

The night passed without incident, and morning dawned once more.

Josiah was up with the camp, and appeared perfectly at home.

Breakfast had been done away with and all were lounging around on the grass, when a horseman was seen coming down the canyon from the direction of the bandits' retreat. A single glance sufficed to show that it was not Wild Edna, but instead, a handsome young fellow of two-and-twenty who resembled her somewhat.

As he rode up he doffed his hat politely.

"You come in the place of Wild Edna, if I mistake not," said Sir Harry, returning the salutation, coldly.

"I do, senor. The Girl Bandit being a trifle indisposed this morning, she commissioned me to wait upon you in her absence, to learn if you have changed your decision in regard to the toll."

"Then you can return to your Girl mistress, and tell her that we shall *never* come to her terms!"

"As you like, senor. To-morrow you will receive the last visit from us, and if you lose *that* chance of acceding to our terms, your fate will be sealed. On the eleventh day, then, after to-morrow—which will be the thirty-first of this month—the flood-gates of Lake Tico will be raised, and a deluge of water will sweep through Devil Canyon. If you are in it, your fate you can well imagine. We shall not hold ourselves responsible for your death, having given you these chances for life and liberty, and ten days to effect your escape in."

"Your name—what is it?" said Sir Fleming, who had ordered Dan and Sir Bruce to cover the outlaw with their rifles.

"Nevada Sam, at your service."

"Very well, Nevada Sam; please consider yourself my prisoner. Dismount, and deliver up your arms."

Nevada Sam smiled, but did not offer to obey.

"You are a fool," he said coolly. "Did not my sister tell you what would befall you should you offer to molest her, on her former visit?"

"Your *sister*?"

"My sister, or Wild Edna, as you know her."

"Yes, I believe she threatened us with some nonsense about what might happen."

"Very well. I reply likewise. Offer me the least hindrance and you will hasten your own death!"

"What! do *you* dare to threaten me? Have a care, sir knave! She was a woman but you are *not*, and I do not fear to shoot you. Dismount!"

"I will dismount, if you so order," replied Nevada Sam, grimly; "but, recollect that if I *do*, your death is a certainty within an hour."

Sir Fleming quailed a trifle, and hesitated.

"You are at perfect liberty to go and come as you please!" cried Sir Harry, at this juncture. "*That* man does not command, here; consequently he has no authority, where I hold sway."

"Thanks," smiled the bandit. "You are wise, I see. No good could possibly come of holding me a prisoner."

Then, nodding to the men and raising his hat courteously to the ladies—particularly to Lady Maude, he wheeled his horse and dashed away.

During the remainder of the day, Sir Fleming and his ally kept aloof from the rest, and whiled away their time in conversation and smoking.

Night fell dark and threatening. Masses of black clouds filled the heavens, and the atmosphere was decidedly rainy.

After the evening meal had been prepared and dispatched, Josiah Hogg volunteered to stand guard, and so leaving him to his lonely vigil, the rest "turned in," to sleep.

About an hour before midnight the storm burst down in all its fury, and so great was its volume that the bottom of the canyon was quite submerged, thereby precluding the possibility of repose. Therefore, the ladies were bundled in the blankets, and all stood and took the pelting storm with good, bad or indifferent grace, as the case might be.

At last the rain ceased, as quickly as it had come, and the bottom became les

submerged by degrees, until the site of the old camp was once more above water.

But so intense was the gloom that one could not see a finger before an eye, and it was only by a sense of groping, and the interchange of words, that the party could be collected. And, as there was no dry wood to be had, it looked very probable that there would be no fire, or light on the subject till daybreak.

"Are all here?" called Sir Henry, with a shiver, as he endeavoured to peer around.

"I guess so," replied the familiar tones of Coggsell—"I am, at least. Mought call ther roll, ter make sure."

"Good. I will do so. Sir Fleming and Bruce, are you here?"

"Ay! ay!" replied the two noblemen.

"And Ladies Milburn?"

"I am here," replied Lady Milburn; "but I do not see Maude."

"Lady Maude and Josiah Hogg!" called Sir Harry.

There was no reply. Again the call was repeated, but no answer.

A hurried and close search was then made, but without result. One thing was only too plain—*Lady Maude and the poet were gone!*

CHAPTER X

A DARING ACT

We left Old Avalanche out in the open savanna, after his just having discovered the fact that he was completely surrounded by the howling Sioux.

Had they seen him?

Yes, very probably, or else why were they closing in around him? Faintly through the pall of inky darkness he could distinguish the shadowy outlines of approaching horsemen, and by them, and the muffled sounds of their hoofs, he knew they were all bearing toward one centre, and that centre was just where he was now standing.

Something certainly must be done. The savages were approaching nearer and nearer, and in a moment would be upon him.

To await their coming and give himself up would be but the initial step toward a horrible death.

"I'll spill a trifle more o' Injun blood, fu'st, ennyhow," was the final conclusion; and gripping his knife he threw himself flat upon the ground.

Florence did likewise, and the two lay as silent and motionless as death.

At last there was a shout, and the Indians drew rein in a small circle. Avalanche and Florence were *lying inside of that circle!*

Fortunately the grass was so tall that they were screened from view.

"The white dog has escaped!" sang out the gruff voice of Idaho Bill. "The Sioux are on a wrong scent."

"The pale chief errs," replied Rain-in-the-Face, who commanded a portion of the party. "Pale squaw come dis way."

"Ugh!" cried Scarlet Blade, a young chief, who had but recently won his spurs of chieftaincy. "Me see um here—stand erect—look at Sioux—den he drop!"

"But he *not* here!" grunted Crazy Horse. "Scarlet Blade young brave. He no wise like Crazy Horse."

"Scarlet Blade look!" cried the eager chief, and springing from his saddle he commenced beating about in the grass, wiggling about on his hands and knees. "If white dog here, Scarlet Blade find um."

On around the circle he crawled, and on account of the darkness, the mounted savages were unable to keep track of his whereabouts, except when they would catch a sound to guide them.

Presently it was inferred by the deep silence that Scarlet Blade had halted in his search.

"Hey!" shouted Idaho Bill, with an oath, "w'ar ye goin', ye red imp? w'at ar' ye at so long?"

"What difference it make to you?" leered Crazy Horse. "Let Injun alone."

"Ugh!" cried the rough voice of Scarlet Blade, from the centre of the circle, "Injun keep much still. Scarlet Blade found trail, Injun sit still on boss. Scarlet Blade trail white dog under hosses belly!"

A moment later Crazy Horse was conscious that somebody or something was near him, and he made a vain attempt to peer down into the grass.

"Who dar?" he demanded, suspiciously. "Dat you, Scarlet Blade?"

"Um!" was the brief reply, and the rustling in the grass proclaimed that the chief was creeping away. Full ten moments passed; then a figure leaped from the grass, and onto the back of the riderless horse of Scarlet Blade.

"White dog no dar," said the disappointed voice of the chief. "He gone, an' Scarlet Blade git up!"

A derisive yell went up from the Indians in general.

"Scarlet Blade is a dog!" cried Crazy Horse, with contempt. Then turning in his saddle, he shouted, in Sioux:

"Away! away! all of you, except a hundred, who will go to the canyon mouth, where the others are! Wait for us! Scatter!"

The order was instantly obeyed. All of the swarming gang, except Crazy Horse, immediately spread out over the prairie, and began to scour about for the escaped Annihilator.

The chief then set out for the entrance to Devil's Canyon, followed by his detachment of braves.

Under the command of Idaho Bill, the savanna was thoroughly searched for a distance of four or five miles, in either direction; but not a trace of the much-feared and more hated Avalanche was to be found.

He had undoubtedly made good his escape into the mountains.

At last the blare of a trumpet caused the savages to relinquish the search, and turn back toward camp. Idaho Bill was among the last to do this, and as he turned his animal's head, he saw the horse of Scarlet Blade passing to his right.

"Hallo, there!" he shouted, "is that you, Injun imp?"

"Ugh dis Scarlet Blade," was the reply, and the horse came forward. "You Idaho Bill?"

"Yas, et's me. Cum along, ef you're a-goin' inter camp."

The outlaw gave his horse the spur, and was about dashing away, when a lasso, one end of which was secured to Scarlet Blade's saddle, fell gracefully around him and drew taut, thereby pinioning his arms to his side.

The next instant he was jerked from his saddle, and no sooner did he reach the ground than the figure of *Old Avalanche, the Annihilator*, was upon him.

Scarlet Blade had perished in that circle search, and the alert scout had donned his head-dress, transferred some of the Sioux's paint to his own face, and took possession of the horse.

It was a daring act, but his desperate position had inspired him with the determination to accomplish it, and he had succeeded admirably.

Thither and hither over the savanna he had dashed among the other savages, *hunting for himself*, as it were, and, whenever he could obtain a suitable chance, driving his knife into the heart of a red companion. And only by chance was it that he had fallen in with Idaho Bill.

Old Avalanche was upon him! To choke off the outlaw's yells was but the work of a moment, and in short order he lay upon the green carpet of the savanna, a helpless prisoner, bound hand and foot, and gagged.

"Thar!" grunted the Annihilator, as he finished his work, and hoisted the outlaw up on to the saddle, after which he himself mounted; "*thar!* I observe et allus

takes tew an' sometimes three, tew make a barg'in. Hey, Iderho Billiam, ain't them yer idees? Don't 'preeshate ther virtues o' ther grate, roarin' Norweegjan Avalanche?"

A groan from Idaho Bill was the only answer. He had sufficient cause to dread the Avalanche—to fear his vengeance.

Old Avalanche headed toward the northwest, and struck off into a gallop, carrying his prisoner with him. For hours he rode on, and at the blush of dawn, drew rein close in under cover of the towering mountains, at a spot where shade, water and grass were plenty. The outlaw was placed upon the ground, and tethering his horse out to graze, he set about finding food for himself and prisoner.

Breakfast was dispatched in silence, and when he had finished, Old Avalanche climbed up into a neighbouring crag to take observations. As near as he could judge, he was something more than ten miles distant from the Sioux camp, and by the clear light of the morning that had now fully dawned, he could see that the camp was astir.

Smoke from many camp-fires rose in spiral columns toward the smiling blue skies, and a general activity and bustle were noticeable. A score or more of horses were being led from the corral, and this told the scout that the Indians, or at least a portion of them, were going on the trail.

That trail was his own, and as he had taken no pains to hide it, he was aware how easy it would be for them to hunt him down.

The scout turned and clambered down toward his own camp.

As he did so his ears were greeted with hoarse and frightened yells, evidently coming from Idaho Bill (the gag had been removed during the meal). This quickened his movements, and in a few moments he had gained the level ground, close to the camp. Here his eyes fell upon a scene both unexpected and ludicrous.

During the Annihilator's absence the prisoner evidently had been trying to climb to the back of the horse and make his escape, but had been surprised by an unexpected enemy. This was no other than the scout's wonderful "j'int," Florence Nightingale, who had opportunely arrived, and attacked the outlaw.

At the time of the Annihilator's *entree* upon the scene, the goat had succeeded in downing his victim, and was bunting him without mercy, rolling him over and over at every lunge, while Idaho Bill's shrieks of pain and rage made the welkin ring.

Old Avalanche gave a yell of ecstasy and sat down to watch the sport.

At last, however, he perceived that the outlaw was nearly insensible, and with a whistle he called the vicious billy from his work of torture.

"Thet'll do fer the present, boyee," was the Annihilator's ejaculation as he patted the animal, affectionately. "Ye stud ter yer work nobly an' ar' desarvin' o' thanks fer et, I think, tho' I'll tend tew Mr. Idaho Billiam, *myself*, now."

With these words he rose to his feet, drew his knife, and approached the outlaw, who lay groaning upon the grass.

Assisting him to a sitting position, he seated himself directly opposite, and the two implacable foes eyed each other for some time, with belligerent glances. Old Avalanche was the first to speak.

"Young man," he said, slowly whetting the blood-stained knife in the palm of his hand, "hev ye got enny reckexyun o' evyer hevin' seen me erfore this peeriodical minnit?"

A grim smile hovered about the desperado's lips.

"I reckon," was the laconic reply; "tho' I've not seen ye for years. I were a young pappoose when you were first brought to the Sioux camp. So was Crazy Horse. We cut your ears off at the torture-stake."

"True," replied Old Avalanche, a twinge of pain visible on his wrinkled brow—"shaved 'em off clusser nor ther beerd frum a boyee's face. But, the best o' et all, Bill, ye ken't brag thet I even flinched."

"No, old man, ye stud et like a lamb, an' I'll guv ye credit fur it."

"What *became* of them flappers?" asked the Annihilator, huskily.

"Don't kno' what Crazy Horse done wi' his'n. I wore mine fur a charm, on a string o' beeds, till it got dried up, like a piece of pasteboard, when I throwed it away."

Tears stood in the old scout's eyes.

"Too bad," he sighed. "I war in hopes o' gettin' them poor souse back sumtime or other, an' gettin' 'em plastered on erg'in. Too bad." Then, as if he suddenly recollected himself, he began to sharpen his knife faster upon his moccasin-top.

Idaho Bill watched him somewhat nervously, growing a shade paler each moment. He could not misunderstand the meaning in this.

It meant death to him!

After a while the edge of the weapon seemed satisfactorily sharp to the touch of the Avalanche's thumb, for he said:

"Do ye kno' ther border code, Billiam?" he asked, slowly.

"I know," was the shuddering reply, "an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth."

"Yes, thet's it—eye fer eye an' tooth fer tooth. But thet hain't the code I shell 'dopt tew this sarcumstance. *This 'll be an ear fer an ear, and a knife fer a throat!*"

The outlaw grew very white, and perspiration broke out all over his face.

"Will ye show no mercy?" he gasped.

"No! ye didn't show me none. As ye did, so'll I do."

"But hold! Is there no service I kin do ye that'll save my life? I do not want to die—I am not prepared."

The Annihilator shook his head.

"I jedge not. Nuthin' short o' yer life will do me!"

Idaho Bill grew desperate.

The light that burned in his enemy's eye was stern and cold.

"I'll make a proposal," he at last managed to gasp. "*Take me ears and spare my life!*"

Old Avalanche reflected.

"I'll make ye an offer," he said slowly, "and yer life depends upon yer decision."

"Go on."

"Wal, I'll cut off both of yer ears, and then, ef you'll show me the old Indian path that leads thr'u' these mountains, or over 'em ruther, tew ther Flat Butte peak, an' tew ther Death Gulch, ye shall hev liberty an' yer decapitated ears."

Idaho Bill groaned and shuddered.

"Go on!" he gasped, white as a corpse;

"I agree. Take my ears and have it over."

"You know the over-mountain way?"

"Ay, ay!"

"And will go thr'u' wi' yer jab wi'out attemptin' no shanannigan!"

"Yes—I swear it!"

Without further words, in less time than it takes to tell it, the poor wretch was deprived of his ears, which were chucked into the avenger's pocket.

He has said, since the transaction of that terrible deed, that he nightly dreams of ears, and could not be hired to attempt another like amputation.

As for Idaho Bill, he fainted; but while he was insensible, Old Avalanche dressed the wounds, and an hour later the two earless men were on their journey over the vast mountain wilderness.

CHAPTER XI

THE THIRD DAY

WHERE were Josiah and Lady Maude? was the question that agitated the minds of our friends as they made the alarming discovery that they were gone. Had the overflowing of the waters swept them away?

No, that could not be, for the bottom of the canyon had not been covered to more than a knee's depth, and no person would have been carried away in such an insignificant flood.

"P'raps ther poet keerried off ther gal," suggested old Dan, as they all stood in the Stygian gloom, undecided what to do.

"Yes; but whither has he gone?" cried Sir Harry, angrily. "Oh! the dastard, the traitor! How my fingers ache to get at his throat!"

"I opine he's gone back ther way he kim, pervidin' he ain't gone t'other way. My ijee ar' that he's interlinked with the canyon bandits."

"Good heaven! you don't mean to say that my darling sister is in the power of those heartless wretches?"

"Wouldn't want fer ter sw'ar tew et: but I'm thinkin' et smells strongly thet way."

"Look to the horses, quick, and see if the mule is gone, then! That will tell the story."

Dan obeyed, with alacrity, and soon returned with the intelligence that the mule and Lady Maude's horse were both missing.

"Oh! God!" groaned Lady Milburn, who had all the time been weeping violently, "I shall never see my child again."

"Yas ye will, mum," replied the guide, doffing his hat, respectfully. "Take old Dan Coggsell's word fer it Lady Maude will not be harmed, and 'll be restored tew yew afore long. I've heerd consider'ble of this Girl Bandit, an' believe her tew be 'bout as fair-tew-average sort o' feline as evyer didn't chaw terbaccar. She won't hurt yer darter, an', afore the big flood comes, I shouldn't wonder much ef ye war hawked away out o' danger jes' like Lady Maude was!"

"Is this your candid opinion, guide?" asked Sir Harry, eagerly. "Do you really imagine it is Wild Edna's plan to save us from the flood which is impending?"

Old Dan smiled grimly.

"Not us, I sirspeck," he replied, with a chuckle—"not us, but the ladies—Lady Milburn and her daughter!"

"Be it so, then. If they only safely escape, I shall not so much hate to meet the worst."

Morning dawned over the giant peaks of the mountains, and as soon as it was light enough for his purpose the guide built a fire out of a few partly-dried limbs and cones which had been washed down from the mountains, and then easily found the tracks of the two horses in the clayey refuse, on which the poet had borne away his prize.

"Thar kin be no doubt o' the case now," he said to Sir Harry. "The bandits hev got the gal, et's purty probable."

Breakfast was dispatched, and about an hour later a body of masked horsemen were seen coming leisurely down the canyon. They were the banditti with Wild Edna at their head.

Sir Harry rose from his seat and doffed his hat politely, to which Wild Edna responded with a smile.

"You have come, I perceive, for the third time," said Sir Harry, "to request the toll payment."

"Exactly! This is the *last call*. You now still have a chance for life and liberty, and if you do not accept, your fate be on your own heads. Would to God I could aid you, or avert the impending doom, but I cannot. Did any of you see an apparition on the top of the Flat Butte at midnight two nights ago?"

"I did! I did!" screamed Lady Milburn, rushing forward and clasping the Girl Bandit's jewelled hand, "I saw it. Oh! girl, tell me—tell me for the love of God, was that an apparition, or was it *human*?"

"Tell me, tell me!" she continued, as Wild Edna hesitated, "for I *must* know!"

"I can tell you nothing, my lady," was the pitying reply. "I am bound by a solemn pledge to reveal nothing beyond the limits of our band. The spectre on the Flat Butte will appear again, just before daybreak of the eleventh day from now, as you saw him, my lady. His appearance will be the signal to raise the flood-gates of the terrible Lake Tico. Fear not, however, dear lady, for you will not be allowed to perish with the rest!"

"But, my daughter—Maude, where is she?"

"Safe and sound, and enjoying a refreshing sleep when we left her. It was out of pity that I had her spirited away. You will soon follow her!"

"Girl!" cried Sir Fleming, advancing. "are you a perfect demoness? Will you see us men, who have never raised a finger to harm you, *murdered* outright?"

Wild Edna flushed, angrily.

"I will see nothing of the kind. As I have told you once before, I cannot avert the flood. I have tried to persuade you to pay the toll, but you have refused. Here my work ceases. On my return to the bandit retreat, I will be cast into a strong cell, by the orders of *another*, and confined there one month for my failure in extorting the toll from you."

"Who is this other?—your gay Nevada Sam?"

"No—indeed, no. He is my brother, and as true and brave a man as any of you. Like myself, he too will be confined, and suffer on *your* account!"

She spoke so bitterly that Sir Harry's susceptible heart at once went out toward her.

"I am sorry for you," he said, walking up to her animal's side—"really, truly sorry, but *I* do not care to yield. Maybe when I see Lake Tico's waters bowling down upon me, I'll hasten to change my mind!" And he made an attempt to laugh gaily.

"It will be *too late*, then!" said Wild Edna, sadly; "once the flood-gates are raised, nothing possessed of life, except trees can live in Devil's Canyon."

"Well, if this be the case, I can consider myself a doomed man."

"You refuse to pay the toll, then?"

"I do, most emphatically!"

"Alas! then you are indeed doomed!" She shot him a glance from her beautiful eyes—a glance in which was mingled pity, sorrow and—what?

The fast-beating heart of the young nobleman told him it was more than the light and glow and interest of a common nature—and his own face flushed at the thought—did this beauteous vision of the wilderness *love* him? It was a thought that filled him with expressionless joy.

The Girl Bandit, however, quickly interrupted his suddenly conceived hopes.

"Will the others pay their toll, and be allowed to go on in freedom?"

"I think not," replied Sir Fleming, who had been conferring with Sir Bruce; "or, at least, not at present. If we decide to pay the toll for ourselves, will it not be enough to advance to your guards, and tell them so when they can inform you?"

"I don't know," replied Wild Edna, doubtfully. "However, I can soon ascertain."

She turned to one of the masked men beside her, and said a few words in an undertone. He then turned his horse's head and galloped rapidly off up the canyon.

"I can soon answer your question, sir," said the maiden to Sir Fleming; "in the meantime do not let us hinder you, or deter you from your breakfast."

"We ate an hour ago," answered Harry, "and *your* presence is most agreeable, under the very embarrassing circumstances under which we meet."

She drooped her eyes, and a blush stole over her purely chiselled features—a blush more of pleasure than confusion.

"You must not flatter," she said. "I am not used to it—I am not used to the great world you live in, or its people. I should not listen to praises from those who could never be aught to me."

Presently the masked courier returned, and spoke a few words in Spanish to Wild Edna.

"Very well," she said; then turning to Sir Harry, she continued. "It will be all right. If any of you conclude to pay the toll, between now and three o'clock of the eleventh morning, you can so notify a guard, who will be posted a few hundred yards up the gorge. He will be authorized to receive six thousand dollars from you, and furnish you with an escort to the outer world!"

"Very well, I will tell them!"

"Now, good-bye, sir, and good luck."

The next moment the horses' heads were turned, and the banditti dashed away.

CHAPTER XII

A NEW ENEMY

Two days and a like number of gloomy nights passed, and still matters in Devil's Canyon remained unchanged.

Escape was impossible, for old Dan had ascertained that the savages had taken possession of the eastern termination of the canyon, although they seemed in no hurry to advance.

"I think," said Sir Harry to Sir Fleming, on the third morning, as all sat around the camp-fire—"I think that between us we had better pay the toll, at least for mother, and restore her, along with Lady Maude, to freedom. It will not be right to let her suffer death just because we are obstinate and refuse to pay the toll."

Sir Fleming sneered.

"I quite disagree with you," he replied, sarcastically. "I am of the opinion that *self-preservation* is first to be considered, before looking to the welfare of others. Lady Hetty will probably be released by the banditti; but, even if she is not, I cannot see that her life is so precious, so valuable to me."

"To *you*—no!" cried Sir Harry, sternly. "Were she dead, you accursed plotter, *her* rich estate of Ferndale, you, as a husband, could claim. Were I and Lady Maude *dead*, all of the old family possessions of the great name of Arriscourt would be yours. Think not, Sir Fleming Milburn, that I am blind to your schemes and machinations. I can read you like a book."

"Years ago, my father, Sir Henry, came to America to explore this wilderness. By some means unknown to us, you, an outlawed relation, joined him in his expedition, and travelled with him until his death—from the top of yonder peak.

"No sooner was he dead than you returned to England with the sad intelligence, bearing papers purporting to have been given you by Sir Henry, previous to his death, which bade my poor mother marry you, in case my father should die during any of his dangerous adventures. You had been a suitor for Lady Hetty's hand, previous to her union with my father, and, under the circumstances, she felt it her duty to obey the mandate of one whom death had overtaken in a remote land.

"So, after making you promise to bring her here to this wild country, that she might at least recover the bones of Sir Henry, she wedded you—wedded a very demon. This was many years ago, when Maude and I were both children. Since then you have been a very cruel master to us, and it is only since I attained my majority, that you could be induced to visit this place, according to your promise."

"This is *not* the Flat Butte in question!" growled Sir Fleming, wincing perceptibly under the young man's accusing gaze.

"You *lie*!" cried Sir Harry, hotly. "This is the place where my father ended his days; or—more properly, perhaps—where his life *was ended*!"

The tone as well as the words of the speaker caused Sir Fleming to grow a trifle pale, and exchange a glance with Sir Bruce.

"We will not continue this conversation, at present," he said, flushing with rage, as he rose and sauntered away.

The morning dragged away, and a hot noon-day sun at last shone straight down into Devil's Canyon.

It was about this time that old Dan Coggsell came striding hurriedly into camp. He had gone down the canyon, a few hours previous, in quest of game, and had promised to be back by sunset. Consequently, his early return warned Sir Harry that something of importance had occurred.

"What is it?" he asked, anxiously. "Why are you back so soon?"

"I jedge thar's need on't," replied the guide, with a dubious shake of his head. "Ef we don't ketch Jessie o' ther shirt afore this time, ter-morrer I'm er hod-carrier."

"Indeed! What is wrong?"

"*Injuns*—copperous-cullor'd Soos. Thar's more'n a thousan' cummin' up this derection, to pay us their respects!"

"Good Heaven! Is this true? Then we must prepare to fight them!"

"I rather guess so, ef we've ther least inclinashun ter keepin' our kerpillery persesshuns. Go wake up ther uther fellers, an' git yer pop-guns in reddyngess fer use. I'm goin' ter thro' up er obstickel tew their progress."

Sir Harry immediately hurried off, while the guide proceeded to perform his part of the work.

Among the effects in the outfit were a pick and shovel, articles which every wise western traveller is not without.

Taking these he proceeded a short distance down the canyon, to a spot where the bottom was formed of soft sandy soil. Here he paused, and began to throw up a barricade of dirt from wall to wall, occasionally dislodging large flakes of rock from above and adding this to the pile.

For hours the guide laboured steadily, and at last, he paused and surveyed his completed work. It was an admirable piece of work, and in case of attack, would, while it concealed the defenders, prevent a rush from the enemy.

The barricade done, Dan proceeded to call Sir Harry. As soon as the baronet beheld the result of the afternoon's labour, he uttered an exclamation of surprise.

"Just the thing!" he exclaimed, as he carefully examined the defence. "With our repeating rifles and revolvers, I am confident we can hold our own for awhile, at least."

"Yes," replied Dan, grimly. "I speculate we kin guv 'em a purty big rub, ef ther Lord's willin'. Now, then, ye git back tew camp, an' snatch w'at grub an' sleep ye kin, an' I'll stand guard. Ef ye heer me screech 'Soos,' ye jist kim a-hoopin' down hayr, fer thar'll be need o' ye. Bring yer fellers, too!"

There was no call from Coggsell until about midnight, when he skulked into camp and aroused the sleepers with the news that the reds were coming. Leaving Lady Milburn alone, the four men crept down to the barricade, rifles in hand, and posted themselves on the defensive.

"I do not see any savages!" said Sir Harry peering over into the canyon beyond, "and I doubt if—*thunder*!"

An arrow grazed the young nobleman's cheek, as he was speaking.

"Ye'll feel 'em, ef ye don't see 'em!" said old Dan with a grim chuckle.

A motley gang of savages could now be distinguished, through the pall of inky darkness, as they came skurrying silently toward the barricade.

"*Fire*—once, two, an' three times!" hissed the guide, and four rifles cracked, sending sharp echoes up the mountain-side, while deadly missiles went hurtling into the Sioux ranks, causing shrieks of pain and death.

Again and again the terrible repeating rifles belched forth streams of lurid flame, and, taken wholly by surprise the savages turned and fled.

"Quick! Now's yer time ter reload!" cried old Dan, and the discharged cartridges were quickly replaced with fresh ones.

But no red-skins put in an appearance again that night, although all of the defenders watched till the sunlight kissed the peak of Flat Butte.

Sir Harry volunteered to stand guard while the others went inside camp and prepared breakfast. So Dan, accompanied by Sir Fleming and Sir Bruce, set out, leaving the young nobleman alone. Arriving at camp, it was discovered that Lady Milburn and one of the horses were missing. No fears were entertained by the guide, however, for he rightly guessed that the banditti had come to remove her to a place of safety.

That day passed, but no further demonstration was made by the red-skins; in fact, not a glimpse of them had been gained.

As soon as night fell over the mountain, Sir Bruce was posted on sentinel duty, to be relieved by Sir Fleming at midnight.

Another—the fifth—morning dawned, and still no sign of the Sioux.

"It's *curi'us*," said Coggsell, as he and Sir Harry stood at the barricade—"darned *curi'us*. I never knew'd Soos ter act up in this shape afore."

"It does seem strange. From what little I have heard and seen, these red rascals are not generally so tardy in attacking a foe," replied Sir Harry.

"Right. But I jedge I've snatched their ijee this time. Knowin' we're sum on shootin', an' not keerin' tew lose enny more braves than possybul, they're goin' ter clim' us."

"What do you mean?"

"Why, ye see sum o' 'em hes gone over the mountings, an' 'll sooner or later git down inter ther canyon atween us an' ther banditters, arter w'ich both divisions 'll give us a nudge frum each eend, at ther same time."

"You believe that is their plan?"

"I don' make much doubt o' et."

That night the savages in the canyon made a rush down on the barricade in large numbers, but Dan was quite ready for them, and the incessant and deadly fire from the four repeating rifles made such

fearful havoc, that the red-skins again retreated, much decreased in numbers, and howling with rage.

The succeeding day passed, and the next, and the next, and still the next, without further developments.

At last the night of the tenth day fell over the mountains, but it disclosed only two figures in the Devil's Canyon at the camp. Sir Fleming and Sir Bruce had long since ridden off up the gorge to pay *their* toll, and be saved from the flood.

Sir Harry and old Dan Coggsell were left to themselves, and their doom!

"No; I will not yield in this, the eleventh hour!" the young baronet had said, with wonderful firmness, when questioned by the others, previous to their departure. "Dan can go if he wishes, and I will furnish him with the requisite toll money."

"No!" cried the old guide, "not much, Mary Ann, ef I kno' myself. I ain't ther coon as will desart a feller in a fix."

So the two had remained, and it was with wildly-beating hearts that they watched the night wear away, toward another day-dawn.

At last Sir Harry exclaimed, as he pointed toward the summit of the Flat Butte, where that terrible spectre had suddenly appeared—the same awful sight which Lady Milburn had seen:

"Look out for it, now, Dan, and say your prayers, for that signal has opened the flood-gates of Lake Tico. Good-bye, old boy!"

CHAPTER XIII

WILD EDNA'S RIDE

FAR up among the mighty, hoary crags beyond Flat Butte, nestling in a deep and gloomy basin, lay the cold green waters of Lake Tico—or Lake Airy, as it has since been christened. A silent, uninviting sheet of water, suspended, as it were, midway between heaven and earth, and formed in a natural square, each corner being a towering peak, and the sides or shores forming a brink to an awful abyss that yawned on every side.

One side of this remarkable mountain-lake overlooked Devil's Canyon, and the other that awful abyss into which Sir Henry had been hurled, years before. The lake shore was accessible from three points, but the hand of man, not of nature, had made it so. On the north-eastern side, a long bridge of Indian network stretched across a yawning precipice, and made connection with a lower peak, which in

itself connected with other gigantic neighbours that formed the chain stretching away off to the great green savannas to the east.

Directly east from the lake shore was a similar bridge, and this connected with the towering Flat Butte at its summit. The third mode of reaching the shore was by means of a *spiral stairway* which, commencing at the southern corner, wound its way gradually up the mighty mountain, until, when reaching a level with the lake, it had made a complete circle around the grey deposit of rock. This, too, had been the handiwork of man, as was readily evidenced by the unmistakable axe-marks and blasting holes. The banks of the lake were very narrow.

At the side overlooking Devil's Canyon were the "flood-gates" mentioned. They had been constructed by the banditti, and when lifted from their rocky fastenings, the waters of the lake could easily pour out in a mammoth volume into the gorge below. These gates were raised out of a groove in the rock by a great wooden lever, which could only be moved by a score of men, and were so deeply sunken that the whole of Lake Tico's waters could be plunged into the canyon in ten seconds' time.

The retreat of the banditti was in such a position that the flood could not reach it, although dashing directly by.

Half a mile above the base of the Flat Butte, where the camp of our party had been, was a break in the mighty wall of the canyon. At this post two armed sentinels always stood. The break in question was a round black hole in the wall, somewhat resembling a sewer outlet, only not so small. A horse could easily pass through this aperture with a person sitting erect on its back. This natural tunnel ran in a semi-curving and zig-zag shape for perhaps a quarter of a mile, descending a trifling grade, when it made an abrupt turn in the bowels of the mountains, and proceeded due east, where before its course lay in a north by easterly direction. At the place where occurred the break in the walls of the canyon, the little stream which ran down its entire length had its source, the flood-gates of Lake Tico being directly overhead, and emitting a constant wastage of water, through crevices in the rock.

By following the tunnel beyond the turn, for another quarter of a mile, you debouched from Stygian darkness into semi-light. You were at the bottom of Death's Gulch, and on a level with the Great Lakes.

It is a natural garden of paradise—an oasis in a vast mountain desert. Two acres

area, in all, fenced in by those majestic rocky monsters, the mountains; green with velvety grass and redolent with perfume from a hundred flowering trees and plants, it is a most astonishing and wondrous sight.

Water from a cascade a thousand feet above is transformed into a mist that trickles down the rugged wall, until it gathers into a little rivulet in the rocky yet grassy bottom.

In the centre of the gulch is a large, barn-like edifice, thatched with fire-branches and sod, and built of rock. Around this, numerous beds of wild flowers are in a state of careful cultivation; here and there are scattered rude settees on which men are reclining, indolently, and smoking.

Although the hour is past midnight, they are thus engaged, for there is work for them to do, presently, and they would be awake.

The gulch is lit dimly with flaring torches, thrust in neighbouring crevices.

Soon a door of the edifice is opened, and four armed men issue forth, followed by a tall, ghastly figure, clad in a trailing robe of snowy white. His hair sweeps his waist; as does an immense beard of silvery hue, and in his eyes burns the unnatural fire of insanity—a fire that might cause any brave man to tremble.

As he stepped from the door a figure attempted to follow, but he hurled her back with an enraged shriek.

"Avaunt! accursed fool! Dost think to evade my vigilance? Back with you, or by the Royal Sceptre, I'll cast thee into the dungeon, from whence thy pleadings for liberty caused me to fetch you."

"Oh! my father!" cried the Girl Bandit, wildly, piteously, "do not open the terrible flood-gates to-night. Postpone the awful crime until to-morrow, or next day, that those two deserted men may have a chance more for life!"

"Ha! ha! ha! ha!" yelled the other, shrieking and gesticulating with mad laughter. "Ha! ha! You would have me spare my sacrificial offerings to the Royal Mountain God and his Divine Powers. Ha! ha! thou art a fool, Zerama. Back, before I curse thee!"

He raised his baton as if to strike, but with a frightened cry she darted back into the cabin.

Summoning all of those men who were lounging on the settees, by a wave of his hand, the man cried in tones of anger:

"Awake, you drowsy fools, awake! Dost not remember that this is the hour of sacrifice—the glorious hour when the waters of Tico shall sweep a path of destruction

through the canyon of the Devil? Awake, I say!"

The men sprang to their feet obedient to his call, and, rifle in hand, formed in line.

"Yes, your greatness," said one, who was evidently a lieutenant, "we are quite ready."

"Good! That is well. Now, away to the flood-gates, and prepare to answer my signal from the peak top!"

The men bowed low, then turned on their heel, and filed away to the tunnel. As soon as they had gone, the strange commander turned to the four armed men who had remained behind.

"Now, Valquero, is my balloon ready?"

"Yes, your greatness," was the reply, "all ready. This way, sir."

They led the way to the wall in the rear of the cabin, where, upon the ground, was a small wicker-basket to which was attached a rope. This ran like a diminutive serpent up through the darkness, through a pulley on the top of the Flat Butte, and back down to the bottom of Death Gulch, again.

Stepping into the basket the commander gave the signal, and the men sprang to and pulled down on the return rope, thereby drawing the basket up out of sight in the darkness. For some time they pulled away manfully, and were at last rewarded by feeling the rope tighten and cease to draw further.

The basket had reached the top.

In the meantime the other banditti had passed through the tunnel, and by way of the rocky staircase reached the shore of the lake, and grasped the fatal lever that was to be the means of carrying death and destruction down through Devil's Canyon. There were full three-score of them, and it would be no feat of strength for them to hoist the gates. All that was now wanting was the signal from the Flat Butte, whither all eyes were turned in attention.

Full ten minutes passed when a faint flash reddened the sky, then followed a pistol report, and a fire whose colour was blood-red flared fiercely on high from the top of the peak.

In the bright light stood that tall, spectral, white-enveloped figure, whose beard swept the gleaming girdle at his waist, and in whose hand waved to and fro the terrible baton.

First, he approached the portion of the plateau overlooking the canyon, and glaring down into its depths, gave vent to a series of wild, horrible shrieks; then he wheeled abruptly and advanced to the edge, overlooking the Death Gulch, and Lake Tico, far beyond. Halting on the brink of the frightful precipice, he raised both arms

aloft. In accordance with plans understood among them, one of the bandits then sprinkled a sack of some strange smelling powder on the shore near to the great lever, and applied a match to it. Instantly a flame similar to the one on the Flat Butte sprang up and illumined the scene.

Every surrounding object was plainly revealed.

All eyes were turned upon the spectral figure—for the fatal signal. Once he raised the baton on high, swung it around his head and let it fall back by his side.

Once!

Then after a lapse of several moments of dead silence, he repeated the movement.

Twice!

Only once more and then the fatal gates would be raised. Eagerly and impatiently the banditti watched.

Finally the long bony arm with the baton began to rise the third time.

But hark! There is the faintly audible report of a rifle, heard from the distant peak with which the northeastern bridge of rope communicates; the rising arm of the spectral chief falls to his side; he staggers back, and with a wild, horrible yell, sinks upon the plateau.

"Stop! stop!" shrieks a voice, as a wiry figure comes bounding across the rope-bridge—"stop! in ther cognomen o' ther Jehooover."

But the banditti paid no heed. With a wild, vengeful scream they sprung the mighty lever, and the great waters massed in Lake Tico went roaring and pouring into the Devil's Canyon.

At this identical juncture Wild Edna and the four guards stood in the mouth of the tunnel where it opened into the canyon. As the water came dashing downward in a grand, awful volume, she turned to them and said:

"I am ready, Josh!" and she sprang into a flat boat lying near.

"Quick, now! cast me out before the torrent grows too fierce. 'Tis a fearful venture, I'll admit, but I must save those men. If I never come back, friends, God prosper you!"

As of one accord, they kissed her hand in silent devotion, then gathering the frail craft in their arms, they plunged it forcibly through the sheet of falling waters, and into the mad rapids beyond.

The boat neither swamped nor capsized, but danced down over the fury-lashed flood with startling velocity.

On—on—on—dashed the little tempest-tossed craft with wild-eyed Edna at the steering-oar!

At last, she knew by surrounding landmarks that she was directly over the place where Sir Harry's camp had been. In vain, here, did she peer around, with hope struggling against hope in her breast that by some strange chance she would see the young nobleman and his guide still clinging to a projecting crevice or spur.

Alas! she was doomed to disappointment. Nothing but the forbidding grey walls met her gaze—nothing but the awful roaring tumult of the furious flood greeted her hearing.

Sir Harry and Dan had been swept away!

CHAPTER XIV

RETURN TO DEATH GULCH

SWEPT away!

A sudden wave of sadness stole over the beauteous face of the Girl Bandit as she realized this, and tears filled her eyes—tears of bitter anguish, for she loved Sir Harry, this wild flower of the mountain—loved him with all the intense power of her maiden nature—had loved him from the moment of her first meeting with him.

Now he was gone!

Oh! how bitter was the pain that now pierced her heart; how silent and torturing the anguish that convulsed her whole being! Her hands clutched tightly to the steering-sweep, but she made no effort to guide the craft, as it plunged along with the mad waters.

It, kept near the centre of the swift current, and escaped being wrecked on the foam-lashed wall of the canyon.

Why care if it did go to pieces? All of the sunshine of her young life had gone out; she was indifferent to all dangers; she wanted to die.

On—on, over the thundering flood, and then she was startled by a loud, ringing hallo.

"H-a-y, thar, ship, ahoy! Whar ye goin', an' d'ye ship passenjars?"

The voice was that of Dan Coggsell. In an instant all her hopes revived.

With almost frenzied energy she directed the headlong craft into a near eddy, where, with skilful hands, she managed to hold it.

"Where are you?" she cried.

"Hayr! hayr! on the starboard side o' ye, in a big black-b'ar hoe! up in ther sides o' ther rocks. Hurry up afore yer skooner gits too far down-stream!"

With a strength that surprised her, Wild Edna gave a few powerful strokes at the paddle that sent the boat spinning across

toward the aperture, whose mouth she could now just define, ahead in the curve.

Nearer and nearer she approached; and at last, as the boat went crashing against the rocky wall, she made a leap and Old Dan Coggsell caught her in his arms and pulled her into the bear's cave! It was the same one from which the guide and Sir Harry had tumbled the big Bruin, a few days previous.

"Thar ye ar', daisy," he said, depositing the brave girl on her feet, "safe an' sound's a shell-bark."

"But, the other!" gasped Wild Edna, shivering with apprehension—"where is he?"

"Ye mean ther boss, Sir Harry? Yas, I see'd you leant thet way. Wal, miss, I'm darnashun sorry, but I'm afeard Sir Harry hes gone under, fer good. Ye kin see fer versel', however, as he lays over thar in ther corner, limp an' loose as an unsturched shirt."

The Girl Bandit did not wait for him to finish the sentence, but hastily groped her way to where the body of Sir Harry lay insensible, with a ragged gash over his temple.

Wild Edna took his head in her lap, and with skilful hand dressed the wound, old Dan assisting as well as he knew how.

"I think 'tain't no kinder use tew," he said, shaking his grizzled head as the moments fled by and still the baronet lay like one in death.

"On the contrary, I think he *will* recover," was the reply. "This is an ugly bruise, but I believe it has only stunned him. Bring me a little water in your hat, and I will pour it down the back of his neck. That will bring him to when nothing else will."

Dan hastened to obey, and scooped his hat full of water out of a trickling little spring inside their retreat. Then leaving the girl to her act of restoration, he returned to the mouth of the cave to watch the flood.

The waters had now gone down, and it was plain that Lake Tico was nearly drained.

"Did Sir Fleming and Sir Bruce come up and pay their ransom?" asked Dan, turning abruptly from the mad waters below him.

"Yes," was the reply, "but not with very good grace. They, with the two ladies, are now lodged in the bandits' cabin in Death Gulch."

Sir Harry now began to show signs of returning consciousness, and soon, to the joy of both, he gave a gasp and opened his eyes.

"Ugh!" he groaned, staring around, until his eyes lit upon the sweetly beautiful face of Wild Edna, when a smile of welcome flitted across his own pallid features.

"Where am I? I have been wounded—had a fight for life—Dan and I. How came I here, and you, too?"

A few words explained all.

"But you, fair Edna—why did you peril so much to try to save us?"

A red flush mantled her face—her eyes filled with tears but her lips refused to speak.

"Ah, sweet girl," he murmured, drawing her head down to his own, "if my poor life is worth so much to you, let me here pay the recompense of so much love, by giving myself to you."

She attempted to rise and leave; he pulled her back, and caught her in a loving, passionate embrace, while he rained kisses on her rosy lips and crimsoning cheek.

"Edna—darling," he murmured, "do not be frightened nor tremble thus. I love you, sweetest—love you as man never loved before."

"But—but——" she faltered, though she did not shrink from his manly embrace, "you know nothing, absolutely nothing, of me or my antecedents."

"Nor do I care, darling. I wed you and love you for yourself, not for your antecedents."

"My parentage is respectable," continued Wild Edna. "My father was a Spanish-Mexican ranchero, who, ere his death, rose to be a distinguished man in Texan history. My mother was an English-woman, and after my father's death, when I and my brother were but children, she came North, intending to settle in Minnesota, where her brother resided."

"But Indians drove her train into this vicinity, from whom they were rescued by our band of mountain outlaws, headed by the old man you saw on the Flat Butte."

"We were all held captives for years, and, in fact, ever since our capture. The second year of our durance, mother married the wild chief, but died a month after her bridal."

"That is enough," cried Sir Harry, kissing her rapturously. "I am amply satisfied, my love, my queen."

In the meantime, the flood had gone down, and Devil's Canyon was free from the destroying element.

When he could at last see the bottom, old Dan apprised the lovers of the fact, and Wild Edna sprang to her feet.

"I must go, now," she said, as Sir Harry

would have detained her, "and see how things have shaped in the retreat. Do not fear for me, for I shall risk nothing."

"Very well; I will try to endure your absence, though it seems hard to part so soon. Are we to remain here?"

"Yes, until I return, and that will be just as soon as I can."

By aid of a lasso, the maiden was lowered from the bear's cave, and soon disappeared up the canyon.

The day passed slowly to the two men.

Night at last fell over the land, and both Dan and Sir Harry sought rest in repose, for they had not slept a wink the previous night.

Early in the following morning, they heard a call from below, in the canyon, and rushing to the entrance, beheld Wild Edna there.

"Come!" she said, excitedly, "hurry and slide down the rope, and follow me to the Death Gulch. Something has happened that demands your immediate presence there."

They obeyed, by quickly scrambling down the lasso, after which Wild Edna led the way up the canyon, to the mouth of the tunnel. Here a squad of four masked men took them in charge, and conducted them through and into the cabin in Death Gulch.

CHAPTER XV

LAST SCENE BEFORE THE CURTAIN FALLS

HERE, a strange tableau was presented. The room was some thirty feet long by twenty wide, and was the main compartment of the cabin. It was furnished in the primitive style of the Far West, and with appointments of the rudest description.

On the floor in one corner was a couch of skins, on which lay a figure apparently in great mental or physical pain; for his groans were loud and horrible to hear. By his bedside knelt Lady Milburn and her daughter, sobbing in the depths of their handkerchiefs, while at their side stood the tall commanding figure of Nevada Sam.

In another corner of the room lay two more figures, bound hand and foot, whom the reader will have no difficulty in recognizing as the redoubtable Old Avalanche, and Idaho Bill. It was Old Avalanche who had fired the unerring bullet which dropped the spectral figure on the Flat Butte, the night of the flood.

After days of tortuous climbing through a wild, awful mountain wilderness, he had arrived too late to avert the flood.

At the opposite side of the room, all the bandits were formed in a compact line, and directly before them stood two prisoners—Sir Fleming and Sir Bruce.

On the farther side of the bed from Nevada Sam, stood a rough old borderer, whose vocation it was to deal out medicine and pills to any who might require his services.

This was the situation of affairs as Wild Edna entered the room, accompanied by Sir Harry, Dan, and the guards. The latter remained near the door, with the guide, and Edna led her betrothed forward to the couch.

"Sir Harry," said Nevada Sam, touching his sombrero respectfully, "you have arrived too late to hear the dying story of the man lying before you, but I am so well acquainted with it, and with his past life, that, if you will listen, I will tell you all."

Sir Harry inclined his head, as he studied the features of the bandit-chief, and Nevada Sam went on:

"Twenty years ago Sir Henry Arriscourt, a great explorer, came to America to travel in this western wilderness, and bring to light the features of unknown parts of the New World.

"He was the sole surviving son of an old house, and a man of great knowledge and culture. In leaving England, his native land, he also left behind him a wife and two infant children, who were the pride of his possessions.

"Years before, Lady Hetty had had another suitor, in the person of one of Sir Henry's relatives, Sir Fleming Milburn by name, but in consequence of some disgrace, he had been forced to quit England and relinquish the field to Sir Henry, who soon after wedded the lady of his choice.

"No sooner did Sir Henry reach American soil, than, securely disguised, his rival offered him his services for a small consideration, and an engagement was effected, after which the two travelled westward.

"It was Sir Henry's highest ambition to do the loftiest peak in this section, ere he proceeded farther, and for that purpose he secured a Canadian guide, but he proving incapable, another fellow was added to the staff."

"Thet war *me*!" shouted Old Avalanche, from his corner—"me, ther great snow-slide o' destruction."

"Darn my socks!" ejaculated a voice, and a man leaped from among the banditti; "see yere, ole hoss, kinder 'pears ter me I've heerd ther squeek o' yer vocality afore, ain't I? I onc't hed a bruther wi' thet

precise same wabble in his v'ice, but ther Sooks got him, w'ile I war, as Shakespeer sed,

"Grafted inter ther army.

"Now, I say, my Christyen fr'end, hain't yer name Hogg—spelt wi' tew G's?"

"Yas, my appellaterve *ar*' Hogg," replied Old Avalanche, excitedly—"Alva Lanch Hogg, sure's beavers hev twins."

"Then allow me ter interdooce myself as yer bruther, Josiah Billiam Hogg—Hogg spelt wi' two G's—the grate *Poet* o' ther Nor'west, an' ther famuse romancer o' ther Powder River Range."

There was a glad cry of delight; the Annihilator's bonds were cut, and the next instant the two long-lost brothers were locked in a bear-like hug.

All this time Nevada Sam was speaking.

"After the second guide was added, the expedition plunged deep into the wilderness, and after many days' toilsome climbing, reached the top of the Flat Butte, above us, only to find that other explorers had been there.

"While camping on the Butte, Sir Fleming and his secret accomplice, Raleigh, the Canadian guide, formed a hellish plan, and executed it.

"The elder guide was sent down the mountainside for cones, and during his absence Sir Henry was lowered over the precipice and dropped down into this, the Death Gulch."

Sir Harry uttered a horrified cry.

"The fall did not kill your father," resumed Nevada, "for the rope by which they lowered him reached within ten feet of the bottom, but in dropping his head struck a rocky spur and fractured the skull, thereby causing insanity, from which he has never recovered. In Death Gulch he found a band of outlaws, and ever since that night, twenty years ago, he has been their chief. Sir Fleming Milburn returned to England, I have learned from your mother, and—well, you know the rest.

"Now, one more matter and I have done. On the night of the flood, this dying man received his death-wound at the hand of yon scout, Old Avalanche—the man who is the only one now living and capable of speech who can bear witness that Sir Fleming Milburn is guilty of an attempt on your father's life. The question is: is punishment to be inflicted on the scout? He says he fired the fatal shot to prevent the signal from being given that was intended to cause the raising of the flood-gates of Lake Tico."

Sir Harry was about to reply, when, by a

mighty effort, the dying man sat up on his couch of skins.

"Set Alva Lanch free!" he said, in a husky whisper. "He is not guilty of intentional murder, and I thank him for relieving me from a life of pain, mental torture and misery. I freely forgive him, as I hope God will forgive me. Sam—where is he?"

Nevada Sam advanced to the side of the couch, with bowed head and tearful eyes.

"Good," said Sir Henry. "My boy, you have been as good as a son to me, and I would see you happy. To place you on equal terms with your fellow-men, I will give you the result of my years of outlawry—one hundred thousand dollars, which you will find beneath this couch, and, moreover, I give my consent to your union with Maude, here; for my eyes have apprised me that you are two not indifferent to each other.

"Harry, my son, in you I see a noble man of whom I am justly proud. You are the last male representative of my own noble house. It therefore devolves upon you to support my dear wife and your mother, in her declining path through life, and also to marry, that the family name may be handed down to future generations. I have selected for you a beautiful bride whose past life has been one of purity and goodness, and whose pedigree is of the best in our American land."

"You mean Wild Edna?"

"I do, my son, I do."

"Then rest easy on that point. She and I have learned the lesson of love, and she is to be mine."

"Thank God. I am now satisfied, and would be content to die were it not for parting from thee, my dearly loved wife."

"Weep not for me, husband," sobbed Lady Hetty, "for perhaps God will soon summon me to join you in that great and better world!"

He kissed her, then sank back on the couch, a smile of glory overspreading his bearded face and ere long he ceased to breathe.

A few hours later Sir Bruce and Sir Fleming were conducted to the mouth of the tunnel by a squad of the banditti, and placed upon strong, swift-limbed mustangs.

Nevada Sam told them that half an hour's

start would be given them down the canyon, and then the flood-gates of Lake Tico would be opened.

Accordingly, the two fugitives plunged their spurs into their steeds' flesh, and dashed furiously away down the canyon.

When the half-hour was up, the flood-gates were raised, and Tico's waters again flew down the Devil's Canyon on its mission of death and destruction!

CHAPTER XVI

CONCLUSION

THE body of Sir Henry was boxed and prepared for transportation, but at the last moment, it was decided to bury him in the gulch, rather than to attempt the difficulty of bearing him back to England.

After the last sad rite was over, a consultation was held with the brigands, which resulted in a resolve on their part to quit the scene of their late operations, and to enter the Black Hills country.

For a small compensation they agreed to conduct our friends out through the canyon, to the Indian fort, where they could join a train *via* the Upper Gap to Fort Dakota.

The start was made on the following morning, and all except Old Avalanche and Josiah Hogg left the Devil's Canyon.

The latter shouldered their rifles and took an opposite course, down the canyon, where soon to the Annihilator's surprise, he was joined by Florence Nightingale, who had been faithfully searching for his master since having lost him, during the perilous trip over the mountains.

Idaho Bill went with the banditti, having decided to join them.

The party whose adventures we have been picturing, reached Dakota fort in due season, and remained there until September 1876, when they started for England. During the sojourn at the fort, Nevada and Sir Harry, armed with proof-papers, found on Sir Henry's person, took a trip down across the country into Mexico, where they succeeded in finding a valuable property, which was duly disposed of, and the proceeds divided between the brother and sister.

THE END

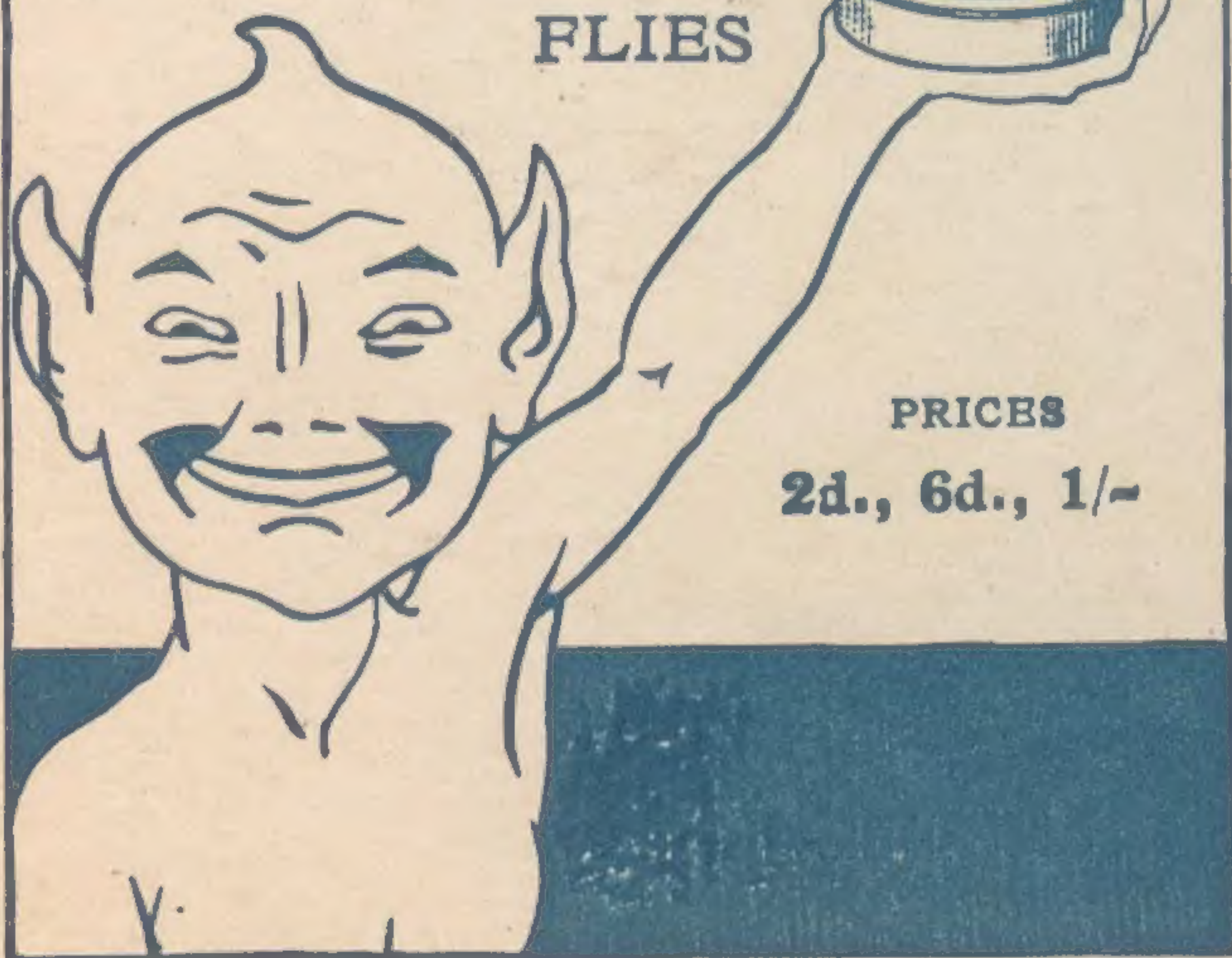
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